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Santa Clara University

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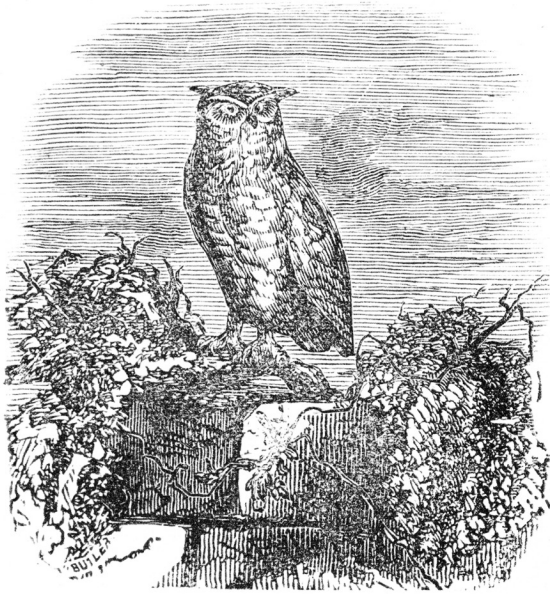


VOLUME 101 ISSUE 2

# SANTA CLARA REVIEW

FEATURING POETRY BY  
MARTÍN ESPADA

# SANTA CLARA REVIEW



*The cover of "The Owl" (the previous title of Santa Clara University's literary magazine), for its second ever issue in 1870.*

VOLUME 101 | ISSUE Nº 2 | SPRING 2014

Cover art by Qiuzi Emily Lin

*The Chess Game*

*oil on canvas —24" by 36"*

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

**E**ACH OF US is convinced of our own originality of perspective. We all believe that no one before us, nor anyone after us, has or will have experienced the world in the same way that we do. We believe that our stories are inherently valuable, that the spontaneous combustion in our own hearts each time we encounter *that person, those words, that place*, is a lesson for the ages. As writers, artists, and readers, we all expect the world to witness our experiences with the same ardent rapture as we do.

The *Review* wholeheartedly encourages this belief. As part of a Jesuit university wonderfully committed to social justice, our staff actively searches for a variety of perspectives for each issue, showcasing the individuality and personal value of each of our contributors. Whether it's kindred spirits comparing old lovers to oranges or poets creating odes to their favorite Hostess snack foods, each perspective that comes into our hands is worth being seen and heard. Not only are the thoughts and details unique, but the execution of the works we select push the boundaries of genre and form. How creative can creative nonfiction be? How many ways can a poem be constructed? How far from reality can fiction really go? Our answer is: however you want.

As five of our eight staff members prepare to graduate this year, including myself, these unique perspectives become more and more important. They encourage us to look through new eyes as we enter a new world beyond the ever-blooming roses of the SCU campus. They embolden us to push



against the confining walls of expectations and presumptions that wait for us wherever we may go. These stories show us the irreplaceable value of cultivating our own minds and talents to share our perspectives with the world, too. For as we find each of these pieces inimitable and precious, so we also find ourselves to be worthy and original. We gratefully thank every contributor, every reader, and every participant for teaching us the most treasured lesson we could have learned, and will continue to learn, in our lives: there is only one of each of us, and our stories are one of a kind.

Farewell, Santa Clara. I and my fellow graduates must bid you *adieu*, but we will forever carry the *Review* in our hearts and pens.

—*Amy Thomas, Editor-in-Chief*



# RETURN

*245 Wortman Avenue  
East New York, Brooklyn*

Forty years ago, I bled in this hallway.  
Half-light dimmed the brick  
like the angel of public housing.  
That night I called and listened at every door:  
In 1966, there was a war on television.

Blood leaked on the floor like oil from the engine of me.  
Blood rushed through a crack in my scalp;  
blood foamed in both hands; blood ruined my shoes.  
The boy who fired the can off my head in the street  
pumped what blood he could into his fleeing legs.  
I banged on every door for help, spreading a plague  
of bloody fingerprints all the way home to apartment 14F.

Forty years later, I stand in the hallway.  
The dim angel of public housing is too exhausted  
to welcome me. My hand presses  
against the door at apartment 14F  
like an octopus stuck to aquarium glass;  
blood drums behind my ears.  
Listen to every door: There is a war on television.

— *Martín Espada*

# MI VIDA: WINGS OF FRIGHT

*Chelsea, Massachusetts, 1987*

The refugee's run  
across the desert borderlands  
carved wings of fright  
into his forehead,  
growing more crooked  
with every eviction notice  
in this waterfront city of the north.

He sat in the office for the poor,  
daughter burrowed asleep  
on one shoulder,  
and spoke to the lawyer  
with a voice trained obedient  
in the darkness of church confessionals  
and police barracks, Guatemalan dusk.

The lawyer nodded through papers,  
glancing up only when the girl awoke  
to spout white vomit on the floor  
and her father's shirt.

*Mi vida*: My life, he said,  
then said again, as he bundled her  
to the toilet.

This is how the lawyer,  
who, like the fortune-teller,  
had a bookshelf of prophecy  
but a cabinet empty of cures,  
found himself  
kneeling on the floor  
with a paper towel.

— *Martín Espada*



# FOR THE JIM CROW MEXICAN RESTAURANT IN CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS, WHERE MY COUSIN ESTEBAN WAS FORBIDDEN TO WAIT TABLES BECAUSE HE WEARS DREADLOCKS

I have noticed that the hostess in peasant dress,  
the wait staff and the boss  
share the complexion of a flour tortilla.  
I have spooked the servers at my table  
by trilling the word *burrito*.  
I am aware of your T-shirt solidarity  
with the refugees of the Américas,  
since they steam in your kitchen.  
I know my cousin Esteban the sculptor  
rolled tortillas in your kitchen with the fingertips  
of ancestral Puerto Rican cigarmakers.  
I understand he wanted to be a waiter,  
but you proclaimed his black dreadlocks unclean,  
so he hissed in Spanish  
and his apron collapsed on the floor.

May La Migra handcuff the wait staff  
as suspected illegal aliens from Canada;  
may a hundred mice dive from the oven  
like diminutive leaping dolphins  
during your Board of Health inspection;  
may your kitchen workers strike, sitting  
with folded hands as enchiladas blacken  
and twisters of smoke panic the customers;  
may a Zapatista squadron commandeer the refrigerator,  
liberating a pillar of tortillas at gunpoint;

may you hallucinate dreadlocks  
braided in thick vines around your ankles;  
and may the Aztec gods pinned like butterflies  
to the menu wait for you in the parking lot  
at midnight, demanding that you spell their names.

— *Martín Espada*

# CADA PUERCO TIENE SU SÁBADO

*for Angel Guadalupe*

*Cada puerco tiene su sábado,*  
Guadalupe would say.  
Every pig has his Saturday.

Guadalupe remembered a Saturday  
in Puerto Rico, when his uncle Chungo  
clanked a pipe across the skull of a shrieking pig,  
wrestled the staggering blood-slick beast  
before the flinching children.  
Chungo set the carcass ablaze  
to burn the bristles off the skin.  
Guadalupe dreamt for years about  
the flaming pig. Of his uncle,  
he would only say:  
*Cada puerco tiene su sábado.*  
And Chungo died, diving into the ocean,  
an artery bursting in his head.

I remember a Saturday  
on Long Island,  
when my father dug a pit  
for the pig roast,  
and neighbors spoke prophesy  
of dark invasion  
beneath the growl of lawnmowers.  
I delivered the suckling pig,  
thirty pounds in my arms,  
cradled in a plastic bag  
with trotters protruding  
and flies bouncing off the snout,  
skinned by a farmer

who did not know  
the crunch of cuero.  
My father cursed the lost skin,  
cursed the rain filling the pit,  
cursed the oven too small for the pig,  
cursed the pig he beheaded  
on the kitchen counter,  
cursed his friends who left  
before the pig was brown.

Amid the dented beer cans  
leaning back to back,  
I stayed with my cursing father.  
I was his accomplice;  
witnesses in doorways saw me  
carrying the body through the streets.  
I ate the pig too,  
jaw grinding thick pork  
like an outfielder's tobacco.  
The farmer told me  
the pig's name: Ichabod.

*Cada puerco tiene su sábado.*

— *Martín Espada*



ROBERT VIVIAN

## LOVE OF A SCRAP OF PAPER

HERE ON THIS earth for a little while I listen to the wind buffet the windows and glance at my hands wondering what kind of bird flew them down to me and for a little while I ponder the moon and stars and the river I go to when I hurt and do not know the way, and here on this earth traveling through space, blue marvel, blue whorl, blue wondering eye and I, a speck on its valleyed surface, love a woman and she loves me and the small miracle of this rises up into the atmosphere like an offering of smoke lighter than a sigh, and here on this earth in a small town in a poor county I listen to the cars and trucks passing on the street below that moves me so strangely for the deep abiding mystery therein, and here on this earth trains call out across great distances and no one knows what they are asking or saying except for the lonely who are always going away themselves to empty motel rooms and almost empty bars, and here on this earth cries of lovemaking and sobs of grief and peals of laughter under an apple tree and the bees all drunk on the apples' cratered faces like barefoot peasants stumbling behind an outhouse, and here on this earth the love of a scrap of paper, any scrap, any blank sheet of white crumpled or smooth and the love of writing down one word then another with a black felted pen in the hope of imparting some tenderness and some truth, some way of reaching out to touch someone, any one, a man with a hammer and bruise on his arm and a woman wrapped up in a shawl or a kid on his bike racing the sun going down on a dirt road electric with the rising and falling sounds of cicadas and crickets and wind rustling ears of corn and each stroke and filigree of the pen a stay against annihilation, and here on this earth the hope that when I die something beautiful will come of it, a flower or blossom or bright shining leaf glowing with brightness and this almost a certainty, and here on this earth fences between neighbors that are sometimes not high enough and sometimes not low enough, and here on this earth a child huddled in the doorway of an abandoned warehouse in a big city

and no one knows his name, her name, small huddled child quaking in rags, and no one can stop the shaking or communicate what it means, and here on this earth a few weeks at the end of winter as winter holds on with its icy grip and wind-lashed snow like so many sweeping veils blowing away to the north, and here on this earth just here and just now the flicker of a candle that almost goes out when an unseen draft moves over it as thorn of flame thrashes from side to side like a little spirit wanting so much to stay alive for it must light the way for some one for a little until the words are written and then printed out on a page, little love note to this earth that does not know its name.

JOSEPH BATHANTI

## FICTIONAL FUTURES

“Made up my mind to make a new start,  
Going to California with an aching in my heart.”

▪ “Going to California,” Led Zeppelin

“If you want a picture of the future, imagine a  
boot stamping on a human face—for ever.”

▪ 1984, George Orwell

FRESHMAN YEAR, I attended a little state teachers’ college in California, PA, a coal town along the septic Monongahela, so solidly polluted with garbage that you could walk across it like Jesus.

Some might call California a steel town. Coal and steel were, in my mind, the same dogs: grime, danger, cigarettes, shots and beers, oxygen deprivation, dwindled life expectancy. It was 1971. Chuck Noll had just scored Jack Ham in the draft to join Mean Joe Greene, Mel Blount, and Terry Bradshaw. Soon there would be a Steelers dynasty through which to sublimate our fatigued souls. Alvin Toffler’s *Future Shock*, published a year before—a discourse on the “premature arrival of the future”—was an international best-seller.

The boys I dormed with in McCloskey Hall grew up in the Mon Valley—Italian and Eastern European names, plenty of Catholics, like me—high school football players from little river towns where the fight song and a set of pads were all there was. Unyielding as tungsten, they were dedicated self-destructive long-haired partiers. Quaaludes, methadone, laughing gas, glue, peyote, chloroform, weed, Iron City quarts, Mott the Hoople, Humble Pie, Black Sabbath—every night of the week. Sky high, going to college was, for them, a dream. For me it was more a miasma, a hallucinogenic lurch

into Limbo, an alternative to Vietnam or busting out a seam underground or spading slag on the Open Hearth like my dad. I loved those boys. We burned it down. They all flunked out.

First semester, I took an English course called Fictional Futures: *1984*, *Brave New World*, *The Time Machine*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *The Wanting Seed* (also by Anthony Burgess), *We*. There was a handful of others that I can't imagine survived: *Teenocracy*, *Sneak Preview*, *The 11th Commandment*, *The Big Ball of Wax*. The professor (I'll call him Dr. Asimov) looked like Isaac Asimov: big heavy black glasses and insane muttonchops, an airy elliptical circumlocution, as if the rest of us weren't in the room, and he chain-smoked. The course was perfectly titled to describe me and my Mon Valley *droogs*. Our futures were merely theoretical. Fictions. Like a lot of what I have to say here. But I'd also like to be clear: coyness is not a trope I admire. Here's something I learned from George Orwell: "Doublethink means the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them." Prevarication is a matter of craft, even when not lying. The most accurate name for anything is story. The future has absolved us of truth.

Apart from going to college simply because everyone else did, I'd gone to California to pole vault on the track team. Suiting up as a California State College Vulcan struck me as the only way to prolong the illusion of my identity as a legendary athlete—though, in that capacity, I'd prove mediocre to thoroughly forgettable. What's more, the coach didn't know a thing about pole-vaulting, I had to thumb to frozen Adamson Stadium at the top of a frigid, wind-tortured hill where I practiced alone, took long Bluebird bus rides to colleges no one has ever heard of, and took lukewarm showers in medieval locker rooms after fouling at the second height. I might be imagining it, or just feeling sorry for myself, but I swear California still had a few aluminum poles. I often got back to campus from practice too late for dinner in the dining hall.

I didn't really know what I was doing there at college, but I rather swiftly found myself seduced by books, and suited to the soothing rhythms of words on a page—perusing them, yes, but writing them as well. Nobody with my last name had ever gone to college. "Just My Imagination" by the Temptations was number nine that year, but I sang to myself that autumn a song a few notches further down the chart: Janice Joplin's "Me and Bobby



Magee.” I was enchanted by the notion of being *busted flat in Baton Rouge, waiting for a train*. I had no idea what that would be like, though freighters hauling coal rumbled the track in and out of California along the river. It was poetry, however, working its magic: the romantic existential despair whining in those trochees and busted iambs and along the dark rails of the Mon Valley.

Occasionally, we hopped a boxcar out of California to Elco and Coal Center, then thumbed into Charleroi where one day, for no good reason, I bought a machete at the Army-Navy Store, and everyone else bought long, green, belted surplus army trench coats and wore them constantly.

My roommate, a four-by-four plug, was called exclusively Rubble, often Barney Rubble, because he looked just like Fred Flintstone’s fellow caveman and next-door neighbor. He’d been a high school wrestler, his ears shriveled like dried apricots from four years of cauliflower ear, his body a gargoyle’s, the limestone eyes of an assassin. He kept a .44 Magnum under his mattress. He liked to smoke bongos inside a huge cardboard clothes dryer box to trap the fumes. I’d be studying at my desk and forget he was in there—the box was a fixture in our room—and suddenly the entire carton would tip over, passed out.

One night, the habitual party raged in our room. I was at my desk, sober as a judge, studying, reading about fictional futures by candlelight and incense, drinking cup after cup of instant Maxwell House whitened with Pream. Huxley declared: “Impulse arrested spills over, and the flood is feeling, the flood is passion. The flood is even madness: it depends upon the force of the current, the height and strength of the barrier. The unchecked stream flows smoothly down its appointed channels into a calm well-being.” I trembled. Through me flowed an “unchecked stream,” a secret tributary that seemed the last of my old unevolved life leaking out. I didn’t want to dam it. I wanted to be the stream. The stream of words. I wanted to be a writer, but I would have died rather than confide that to anyone except a gentle, indescribably beautiful and delicate girl who would love me desperately, sacramentally, for the rest of our lives.

I had written a poem called “This Disgruntled Noise” and submitted it anonymously to Pegasus, the student literary magazine:

*This disgruntled noise  
That I make is one of*

*Longitude, latitude,  
Altitude, solitude,  
Multitude and most  
Of all – one of  
Attitude.*

It doesn't matter that I didn't—and still don't—know what it means. It does, however, have a number of indisputable true rhymes. More than anything it's a random assemblage of sounds I found pleasing, a kind of inchoate profundity that I took to be my unconscious genius. It issued from the *deep image* school, though I'd yet to hear of the *deep image*. Perhaps I was channeling Lorca, though I hadn't heard of him either. At the time, I was certain poems could get away with gobbledy-gook that meant absolutely nothing. The more layers of enigma, the better. At any rate, when *Pegasus* appeared in kiosks across campus, and on dormitory lobby coffee tables, I was very happy, very proud, that my poem had been published. Students ambled to their classes, thumbing through it.

The guys were wasted, capering about like a band of satyrs. Rubble and some of the others read selections from *Pegasus* and offered guffawed critiques.

"Here's one," croaked Rubble, "This Disgruntled Noise." Then he proceeded to read it.

The guys lost their minds. They hooted and slobbered and went into conniptions. "Jesus Christ," they chortled. "Oh fuck!" Then they ripped through another reading and rolled on the floor.

"What about it, Bathanti?" Rubble inquired. "You're the authority on this kind of shit. Isn't that the dumbest fucking thing you ever heard?" Then he led the boys in another round of daffy ridicule.

I turned from Huxley, the other gentleman in the room. "It's pretty bad," I said.

My only stroke of genius in writing "This Disgruntled Noise" was that I had left my name off it. Anonymity was my genius, truly my salvation, not my verse. I was destined to be anonymous (I actually thought ANON was someone's name). But again, anonymity, even though I had already achieved it, was something I'd inhabit much later and at great cost. That night, I betrayed myself. I denied my poem like Saint Peter in Gethsemane denying Jesus. It was clearly the right thing to do.

The room was eerily illuminated with black lights, everything garbled, slowed pharmacologically to 33 RPMs. Alice Cooper's "Dead Babies" played as high as it would go. Rubble held in this big hit. Who knows what else he might have ingested. Brainless risk was his specialty. Then Big Tim, a giant, bear-hugged him from behind, as was the practice, ostensibly to intensify the experience—we termed it *hyperventilating*—until Rubble passed out. Passing out was looked upon as a desirable thing. Then, instead of easing him onto a bed, Big Tim inexplicably let him drop to the bare tile floor and Rubble split his forehead along an eyebrow.

When Rubble came to, he just laughed through the gushing blood: "Far out."

We had to rush him to Brownsville General, four or five miles away, ten minutes south on Route 88. I drove Enzo's old powder blue Dodge Dart with a push-button transmission. A Vietnam vet, though the war still raged, Enzo wore his camo bush hat at all times. He was 26 years old, on the GI Bill. We called him *The Old Man*. He bought the Iron City. His idol was George Blanda, the ancient war horse Oakland Raiders quarterback. Enzo wore Blanda's number sixteen jersey and ate acid. Like everyone else, he was too smashed to drive. By default, I ended up with his keys. The boys accorded me an exalted status because I studied and never missed a class. A load of us—Rubble, Enzo, Big Tim, and I—packed into the Dart.

I'll name one other guy, Clark, notable because he had somehow found little anonymous California from Queens, New York (a real stretch as no one in Pittsburgh had heard of a California other than the one up against the Pacific). He looked like a miniature Jagger, and had Joan Rivers' nasal yammer. As if he had a string in his neck, like Chatty Kathy, which could be pulled at intervals, he whined, "Wow, that's intense!" which he repeated for the duration of our trek to Brownsville. *Intense*: the shibboleth for that entire academic year in California.

We travelled across the old Brownsville Bridge, a truss bridge, fixed to forty-ton blond granite bulkheads, spanning the wide Monongahela. It connects Brownsville and West Brownsville, located on Bridge Street in downtown Brownsville off of High Street. *High* Street. Everybody laughed at that, especially Rubble, his cracked jade eyes flickering—one of them streaked with blood—out of the towel we'd wrapped around his head. We were already keen students of irony.

It was the river I thought about that night when I should have been thinking of Rubble. There were two bridges: the one we careened across and also its doppelganger reflection undulating upside-down in the subtle current of the moonstruck river. The moon lit the inside of the car. In the rearview mirror, smiling like something really swell had happened, as if we were on our way to a party, Rubble looked exactly like Alice Cooper in his zombie cannibal get-up. Every so often, he'd mimic Clark and wheeze, "Wow, that's intense," then laugh himself silly.

The vast water was black. Stars floated in it. I had forgotten they originated in the sky. I had forgotten the sky. Then the clouds draping the moon fell away. The water paled white. The massive barkless Sycamores on the Brownsville side shone alabaster. The bank was lined with a big red barn, a grain mill, a rusted gantry and a couple trailers. Farther down the river orange flame spewed across the blurred distant skyline: Pittsburgh, where the Monongahela colludes with the Allegheny to forge the Ohio. Blacktop along the river led off into the deep woods of West Virginia.

On the doppelganger bridge, the Dart, on its back, skimmed the water's surface. We were in the car on the bridge, yet there was that other car of inverted boys hurtling along, about to drown. Then we were those other boys hurtling into the future, hurtling into the moon like rookie astronauts out of H.G. Wells. The moon conjured in Fictional Futures, the moon too big to be the moon, the one Neil Armstrong had trod two years earlier on my 16th birthday.

Then, there on the bridge, suspended in that interstice over the unearthly water, with wounded Rubble and that crew of fine boys, I remembered the sky. Enzo was back there freaking out. We thought that was just the way he was (twitching and beating the back of the seats like the Stones' drummer Charlie Watts), pioneering PTSD for the fictional future that would coin the term, *post-traumatic stress disorder*. The United States still had 140,000 soldiers fighting in Vietnam. I and every one of my passengers in the Dart, except for Enzo, were eighteen years old—draft age.

And I wasn't scared a bit. Christmas break was right around the corner; then February second, the day of the very last Vietnam draft lottery and the determination of our futures—so much like fiction would they be. There were boys in that car with bad numbers waiting for them.

Coming into Brownsville, we passed dank bars with gaudy neon signs for Iron City and Rolling Rock listing in their eaves, the VFW, church fish-

fries on every corner. Pink Butcher paper in the windows of little grocery stores hawked chipped ham, Klondikes, smelts, and pepperoni rolls. The smoke in the valley was red, but it was just the way the lights and Rubble's blood played off it.

## MUQATTA'AT\*

Your name begins with *Meem*.  
For centuries scholars debated  
what this letter could mean.

*Meem* for Ma. *Meem* for the bridge  
that leads to the oneness of God.  
*Meem*, luminous letter—

My favorite thing to do as a child  
was to smell the folds of your *orna*  
as you sat after your prayers.  
One leg out, palms covering  
your face.

I was too little then to know  
as I know now  
who you were talking to  
and who had been listening

all those years, in the graveyard  
marked only by a neem tree  
and wrought iron.

*Meem* for the wordless  
gesture. Close to my cheeks.

You tell me this world is but two days long.  
These two days have been more full  
than I can tell you.

When my love in the dark whispers to me:  
Hold me

I learn the secret of your name.

— *Samiah Haque*

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\*Muqatta'at are unique letter combinations that appear in the beginning of 29 suras (chapters) of the Qur'an. Muqatta'at literally means abbreviated or shortened. Their meanings remain unclear and are considered by most Muslims to be divine secrets.

## 32 VIA SAN NICOLO

my hand clutches a scrap  
of paper folded refolded  
inside your hand scrawled  
the number the street and me  
head up head down corner  
to corner to cross street  
cobblestone reconnaissance

wishing not to be missing  
in this circling half-light  
your face in the second  
window frame waiting  
for a glimpse of my face  
then a knock or a call up  
a bell signaling arrival

— *Brian Thorstenson*





BEWARE OF BISON  
JAKE BARZ  
digital photography



IDAHO

JAKE BARZ

digital photography



## CHARRED BISON

CASEY CLIFFORD

clay — 18"



# ADHD

KATHERINE ALDERS

oil pastel and graphite — 22" by 15.5"

## SCONES

I have one memory of eating scones—  
You almost never want to hear this,  
in lieu of never having started  
talking, or writing, or having  
ever been born in the first place—in a garden center  
in the south of England  
on the first clear day in history  
with a couple of old women discussing  
the latest missteps  
of the council (a real catastrophe), and another person, a person I  
would later hurt irredeemably, sitting  
on a bench nearby, grinning  
as I put the biscuit in the cream,  
the fruit on the biscuit, a hand on a hand on a  
tea cup  
rattling the world awake  
with the novelty of sunshine—  
that's the good part—  
and then a walk home  
in the cool rain, past the power lines  
that provided us, at last, with a graphical representation  
of one of our many possible fates,  
death by mid-air electrocution,  
thereby making us feel somehow  
virtuous  
for sticking to the path.  
And I know the pavement still dreams of James Dean at Cambridge,  
or of me on that bench that day,  
and then following the path back,  
forgetfully, to biscuits.  
Moving a couch, lighting a match,

drinking gin, surreptitiously  
on an air mattress  
in the still of morning, and her breathing,  
her breath. And then,  
sun. Then sun. Then  
sun sun sun—

— *Jesse Kidd*

## HEAVEN'S DESSERT

Masked by gold and bound by light  
You are the one I dream about

Lambent, injected with the clouds of heaven  
Soft to the touch, sappy all around

For when they took you away from me, I was sure  
The barren land of my stomach would never rejoice again

To go out of business, I did not believe so  
They exploited you, sold you on Ebay, and tried to make copies...  
but I never lost hope

You would comfort me when no one was there  
Aisle 6 was your home

When my knee was smeared in blood from a tumble  
You were at my aid

Topped over ice cream, I never did need a man  
Smeared about my mouth on prom night, I was not alone

By the touch of god you are created  
So divine and so pure

And by the will of god you return  
In transparent synthetic draperies

They call you Twinkies, sponge cakes with a creamy filling  
But I call you *mi amore*, my one true love, my savior

— *Khoa Sinclair*



## OUR FAMILY TABLE

Wine-drenched slices of peach,  
tangerine, verbena leaves,  
and bleeding, black berries:  
stain the naked wood of our family's table.

Over spring, when it's still too chilly  
to dine outside, petals fall upon it  
and dry, brushed easily away  
by the first breezes of summer,  
when small birds who've  
made it through winter  
hop along its planks.

We shoo them away  
and someone is tasked  
with hosing down the boards,  
rinsing dust and flecks of earth  
from its weathered surface.

After our first meal outside,  
when the table is alight  
by summer's beeswax candles,  
warmed by hot plates and  
chilled by clear, dripping glasses,  
we'll have talked our share around it;  
voices saturate its wood.

Many meals are shared  
into the warm dusks of the season,  
sometimes late into the night  
until the candles are too low;  
then, we are at the table again  
for soft-yoked eggs



and heavy mugs of coffee,  
morning tea, and fresh juice.

It's a large table, accommodating enough dishes  
to feed our family, our loved ones,  
new relatives or little ones  
who seem to spring up every year.

When the table is finally old enough  
to sway its back beneath our final dinner,  
its legs feeble, like old knees creaking,  
we know it's time to separate the planks,  
gently bundle each brittle piece  
for kindle. It's wrapped with twine.

The old wood seems to be content with us.  
When a frosted evening comes,  
it jumps alight in our hearth.  
It doesn't pop or crackle loudly,  
the way other wood protests.  
We don't add any new logs.  
Our table burns for hours.

We all sit around it, warm.  
In the spring,  
we will have a new table built,  
perhaps by the same tree our first  
was from.

— *Kirsten Klaas*

NEIL CONNELLY

## THE COMPLETE AND ILLUSTRATED GUIDE FOR MEETING YOUR MOST SACRED OBLIGATIONS AS AN ALTAR BOY

**A**FTER WHAT HAPPENED during lunch period, Thomas Mulligan wasn't surprised when he was summoned via intercom to Sister Anita Joseph's office. His sixth grade teacher, Sister Cecelia, paused from the penmanship exercises she was slanting across the chalkboard and waited for him to leave while all his classmates watched. He made eye contact with no one, staring instead at his black shoes, which though he'd polished just that day with his father's can of Kiwi, were already somehow dull with smudges.

Thomas took the long way, down past the gymnasium and the music room and his old kindergarten classroom, where he recalled his tender crush on Ms. Podgornik and drawing pictures of rainbows and butterflies. Every Friday afternoon before dismissal, the children who hadn't had their name put on the board for being disruptive at some point during the week were allowed to select an item from the treasure box. All day Friday, Thomas would try to decide if he would pick a rubbery finger puppet or a baseball card or an eraser shaped like a farm animal. The instant he got home, he would show it to his mother and she would squeeze him tightly and tell him what a wonderful boy he was.

When Thomas arrived at the principal's office, he found her sitting sternly behind the huge oak desk, hands folded. He sat in a straight back chair before Sister Anita Joseph, who began, "Merciful Christ Jesus guide me," before offering a brief sermon on honesty and integrity. Thomas was recalling the widespread rumor that the nun wished she were a priest when she asked him what he knew about Peter Gordon. Thomas stared at a framed photograph of the Pope, John Paul II, on the wall. On the day last spring after his shooting, every student at Most Precious Blood had spent a full afternoon in prayer in the church. They knelt in absolute silence for two hours.

“Peter Gordon,” she repeated. “The cafeteria bathroom.”

Thomas shrugged and said nothing.

Sister Anita sighed and said, “You’ve become quite the cross to bear this year. If not for your mother’s heart, for sure and for certain I’d have you expelled.”

She lifted the receiver from the phone on her desk, dialed a few numbers on the rotary, then said, “Yes, Patricia. If he’s available, I’ll be sending the boy over. Very good.”

Thomas watched her pull out a sheet of paper and write several sentences, pausing now and then, for the right word the boy thought. Then she folded it neatly and tucked it into an envelope, which she licked and pressed tightly shut. She wrote something on the back, then handed Thomas the envelope. “Bring this to Monsignor McGinley.”

Thomas hesitated then took the envelope. In elegant cursive that Sister Cecelia would surely have admired, the principal had written, *In Christ’s name*, across the flap, a kind of wax seal to prevent tampering. Sister Anita Joseph stared at him, unmoved, and said, “In the rectory.”

Without his coat, Thomas folded his arms against the cold as he followed the fractured sidewalk around the church. He climbed the rectory stairs he’d passed for a decade but never gone up. Once through the wooden double doors, he located Monsignor McGinley’s secretary, who barely shifted her eyes from her typewriter before saying, “He’s expecting you.” She glanced toward an open door to her left, then went back to rapid fire clattering, punctuated every few seconds by a *ding!* that made Thomas twitch.

Monsignor McGinley, a lanky man with thin graying hair, stood at the window in slanting sunlight. He picked dead leaves from a potted plant on the sill. Thomas offered him the envelope, which he took before saying, “My ficus might not make it to spring.” He walked to his desk and dropped the envelope into a pile. Thomas was surprised he didn’t open it immediately. The priest sat and asked, “How’s your brother Brendan, Mr. Mulligan?”

Still standing, Thomas said, “Fine, sir.”

“Nose guard at Shippensburg?”

Thomas’s eldest brother played right tackle at Kutztown, but Thomas simply nodded, not sure how to correct a senior priest without seeming disrespectful.

“He was scrawny when he was here. Boys mature late, you know. That’s something for you to keep in mind.”

Thomas, neither small nor big for his age, wasn't sure how this applied.

"And what about Edward and Joseph? Both at St. Catherine's, correct?"

"Yes, sir." Edward was directing the high school play, *Brigadoon*, and Joseph—though just a junior—was co-captain of the wrestling team. Thomas waited for Monsignor to bring up the past glories of the Mulligan clan, but the priest held a brief silence. Thomas looked at the red cushion of the high-backed chair in front of him. The seat looked like a pillow, but he hadn't been invited to sit. The priest again considered the envelope from Sister Anita but set it back down a second time, still without opening it. "Quite a financial sacrifice for your mother and father," he said, "putting you four boys through a Catholic education."

"I know," Thomas said. He rested a hand on the back of the red cushioned chair and prepared himself now for the lecture about appreciating his blessings, honoring God's call, bearing witness to His works, living up to one's potential as a soldier in Christ's holy army. Over the last year, versions of this had been dispensed by each of his brothers, his father, and even Mr. Repka, Most Precious Blood's janitor/gym teacher, who pulled Thomas aside one day after an especially lackluster attempt at kickball and asked him when he was going to stop wasting his God-given life. It was a question Thomas had asked himself, awake in the bottom bunk, long after the others in the house were asleep.

But instead of lecturing Thomas, Monsignor lifted a yellow sheet from his desk. "I noticed that your name is not on the roster of altar boys. Don't I recall you going to the retreat last year? You took the class, did you not?"

"I did," Thomas said. "I failed the test."

"You failed the first time," Monsignor said. "Christ believes in second chances." He opened and shut several desk drawers, then finally pulled out a booklet and stood, handing it over the desk to Thomas. He remembered the cover. A cartoon boy on his knees smiled up at a cross, above which were the words, *The Complete and Illustrated Guide for Meeting Your Most Sacred Obligations as an Altar Boy*.

Monsignor said, "Study this over the weekend. You can ask your brothers any questions. They were all excellent servers. I'm putting you down for next week's six-thirty masses. I'll see you in the vestibule Monday morning at six sharp."

After saying this, the priest nodded, then sat and picked up a pen, which he began to scrawl rapidly across a legal pad. Thomas realized the meeting

was over, and he'd never even sat down. "I'm not sure how I'll get here at six in the morning."

Monsignor didn't stop writing. "Christ didn't ask how He would accomplish His responsibilities. He simply did them."

Holding the booklet, Thomas turned and walked past the secretary, back out into the cold. Only then did it occur to him that Monsignor McGinley had never mentioned what happened with Peter Gordon.

At lunch each afternoon, Thomas sat at a table with Niles Shaeffer and Harold Janoso, who talked almost exclusively about their *Ataris* and *Dr. Who*. He wasn't really friends with them, but he could eat in relative peace. Earlier that day, while working his way through a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, Thomas felt a twinge of the gas pains which occasionally meant an evening spent in a fetal tuck.

The cafeteria bathroom was down a thin hallway, past the coat check room they used when the cafeteria was employed as an auditorium for school plays or meetings of the Knights of Columbus. Thomas was pleased to find the bathroom empty, and he took the stall on the end. Just as he was finishing, he heard the squeaky hinges of the outer door. He waited for one of the stall doors to open or the flush of a urinal, but there was only silence. Then there was a snuffle, followed by another, and Thomas was soon certain he heard muffled weeping. When he flushed the toilet and left the stall, he found Peter Gordon leaning into a sink, looking surprised to see him. Peter was a fifth-grader, pale-skinned and paunchy. The two boys had passed dozens of times in the hallway and library, but had never spoken. Peter wiped at his eyes and turned on the faucet. Thomas washed his hands and did not look when Peter sobbed, even as he splashed water on his face. Thomas activated the new hand dryer that sounded like a lawn mower. Inside the mechanism, the red coil glowed with heat. When it shut off, Thomas heard Peter behind him, crying still. He turned and said, "Stop that."

Peter didn't acknowledge this. He gazed into the mirror and watched himself cry. Thomas raised his voice. "Come on," he said. "Cut it out."

This only seemed to make matters worse for Peter, as he began now to blubber. There were tears and his chest heaved as he tried to catch a breath. He looked at Thomas with his wet, red eyes and seemed fragile and desperate.

Thomas stepped over to Peter and shoved both hands into his shoulders. "I said stop!"

Peter fell backwards onto the floor, then did a kind of crab crawl away from Thomas, who advanced on him. The trembling boy backed up under the sink and curled into himself, covering his face with a chubby arm. For a moment, Thomas glanced at the door, and he even took a step in that direction. But then he heard Peter snuffle again and he turned back. Sometimes at night when he couldn't sleep, when the rest of the Mulligan clan was peacefully dreaming, Thomas fought hard against the urge to cry.

Thomas, who could boot the kickball clear over the playground fence if he wanted to, drove his foot into Peter's ribs. For balance, he gripped the sink.

Friday night, Thomas' mother rose from the dinner table to answer the ringing phone in the kitchen. She came back a moment later and said her husband's name, then took her seat again. Thomas looked at her, read her concerned expression, and knew. He heard his father talk low, then set the phone back on the receiver. When he returned, he went back to eating, and Thomas' brothers re-engaged an argument about the merits of soccer as a sport. After a few minutes Mr. Mulligan set down his steak knife and fork "That was Monsignor McGinley," his father said, turning to face Thomas. "Seems you'll be needing a ride early on Monday morning."

"I was going to ask you on Sunday," Thomas said.

His father was quiet. Then he picked up his fork, stabbed a piece of the London broil. "This boy. Did he start the fight?"

Mrs. Mulligan cleared her throat, but said nothing. She brought her napkin to her mouth, touched the edges, then dropped it back onto her lap.

Thomas recalled Peter's eyes on his, the way he looked so pathetic. "He did."

Mr. Mulligan chewed and swallowed. "Alright then. Mulligans don't start fights. We finish them. Right?"

All three boys, familiar with this expression, nodded in unison.

Over the weekend, Thomas helped Edward rehearse lines for his play, acted as a dummy for Joseph's wrestling moves on a gymnastic mat in the basement, watched a Godzilla creature double feature, and used an old World Book encyclopedia to scribble out a few lines for a social studies

project on Africa. His mother marked it for grammatical errors and returned it to him for corrections.

Now and again, Thomas would flip through the altar boy booklet. There was a list of questions to determine if you were mature enough to serve. *Can you sit without fidgeting? Are you prepared to audibly say all the prayers and responses? Do you strive to be an exemplary Catholic?* There was a step-by-step explanation of the mass and the role of the altar boy at each stage. In the back was a glossary with terms that seemed like magic words: *cincture, cassock, cruets, paten*. On Sunday, from the pew he watched the altar boys swirl around the altar at the ten o'clock mass. Father Coyle was the celebrant, and just as he needed something, one of the altar boys stepped forward. Even taking into account the instructions in the booklet, it seemed to Thomas that they were all following a mysterious and unknown choreography. Thomas expected to go in on Monday morning, fail some test, and then deal with the consequences.

His father, a union lawyer with clients like Mack Truck and Bethlehem Steel, pulled up in front of the church at 5:55. He told Thomas to do his best, and Thomas climbed out into the frigid air. He could see his breath as he climbed the stone steps, and the metal knob on the great door felt like a hunk of ice. When he pulled on it, it didn't budge, and Thomas turned to see his father already a block away, the turn signal blinking. Locked out, Thomas grew colder and angry, so much so that when at 6:10 the door finally opened, he snapped, "Freezing out here," and brushed quickly past Monsignor McGinley.

Inside the church, it was only a bit warmer. The air was very still, very quiet. As he followed Monsignor McGinley down one of the side aisles, he found himself growing calmer. The priest, dressed plainly in black pants and a black shirt, led him to a room with a wall lined with closets. Together they selected a red cassock with a white surplus that fit overtop. Thomas struggled with the white rope he knew was supposed to function as a kind of belt. There were tassels at the end. The priest glanced at his watch and said, "Are you prepared to serve God?"

Thomas played with the belt and said, "I really didn't get a chance to study that book so much."

"I see," Monsignor McGinley said. "Finish up then. It's almost time."

He followed the priest to another room, where the old man slipped on his own holy vestments. Thomas watched him kiss the stole, which he then slid around his neck like a scarf. They stepped through a door onto the altar and Thomas saw that there were now people in the pews, maybe a dozen, all of them bent in prayer. Monsignor McGinley showed him how to light the four candles that surrounded the altar, and he brought him to a table on the side. He pointed to the shining items, glass and gleaming gold, and in a low voice named each one and explained its function.

Lastly he picked up a golden disk with a wooden handle. "*Paten*," he said. "At communion, keep this under the host while I place it in the recipient's mouth. No sliver, no crumb, no speck, must touch the ground. Keep it under the recipient's chin until they've closed their mouth entirely. Do you understand?"

Thomas nodded.

"At the moment of consecration, those wafers become the body of Christ. The entire mass is a celebration of this miraculous act. As an altar boy, you are guardian of the body of Christ. This is no small obligation, and it calls for the most serious commitment. For the body of Christ brings nourishment to the soul. It is hope and it is renewal."

Each week at Sunday Mass, Thomas plodded up the receiving line and took communion, but he hadn't thought about it for some time. The priest was staring at him, waiting for some response. Thomas said, "I understand," even though there was a great deal he knew he did not.

During Mass that first morning, Monsignor spoke under his breath, guiding Thomas around the altar. *Stand there. Bring me the red book. Remain kneeling.* When he wasn't busy following the priest's instructions, Thomas found himself staring out at the scattered members of the congregation, all sitting far apart from each other. He wondered what would compel them to come here, to leave behind the warmth of their beds so early on a weekday winter morning.

Several times, he was struck by the purity of a singular moment. The warmth of the priest's hand when they shook at the Peace of Christ, the hardness of the marble floor when he knelt on it, the flickering white flame of one of the candles. As he was preparing to bless the hosts, Monsignor had Thomas bring him a tiny glass pitcher and a deep glass plate. The priest



held his fingers over the plate and said, "Pour a little water." As Thomas did this, the priest closed his eyes solemnly. In a voice so quiet Thomas barely heard him, the priest said, "Wash away my iniquities. Cleanse me from my sins." He wondered what wrongs Monsignor McGinley was thinking about when he said those words.

He watched the priest lift one large host, snap it in two over the chalice, and continue through the consecration. He saw him take a host into his mouth, then he turned and said, "Bring the paten." Together, the two of them went down to the center aisle. Standing at the priest's side, Thomas watched the aged and bent parishioners amble forward in the half light. Three used canes and one leaned into a walker. Mixed in with the seniors was one man in his forties, wearing a threadbare business suit. Thomas looked into their faces when Monsignor McGinley said, "Body of Christ," and each one seemed transported when they spoke the amen. In the back most pew, a woman did not rise from her knees.

But for the ones who did come forward, Thomas was careful to hold the paten beneath their mouth, and he watched closely after communion, when Monsignor McGinley returned to the altar, took the paten, and brushed whatever invisible bits remained of the body of Christ down into the chalice. He added some water, swished it around, and drank. He recalled reading in his booklet that a special sink was used to clean any of the items that came into contact with the Eucharist, one that emptied not into the sewer but into the pure and sanctified ground beneath the church. Clearly Monsignor McGinley was cleaning up, concluding. Thomas felt the sudden sense that he'd somehow screwed up again and forgotten something crucial. He stepped forward, dipped his head to keep his voice low and asked, "When do I receive communion?"

Monsignor McGinley calmly finished what he was doing, set a gold plate atop the chalice and turned. As he stepped toward his throne-like chair he said flatly, "When you are ready."

Thomas apparently wasn't ready on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday morning either, as Monsignor never paused to offer him the Eucharist. Thomas recalled a story his brother told, about a homeless man who walked into a church in Easton. After the priest gave him communion, the man spit it on the ground and stepped on it like a cigarette. As he turned to leave, the priest dropped to all fours and took the crushed host into his mouth, then

charged after the vagrant, tackled him, and licked the sole of his tattered sneaker. Thomas wondered if the story was true.

As the week went on, Thomas did find himself being less clumsy, less uncertain about his duties. It was a simple ceremony taken step by step, and at night he consulted certain passages from his altar boy booklet. He found himself looking forward to two moments most: when he helped Monsignor wash his fingers, and when the gathered came forward for communion. As an altar boy, he was virtually invisible, and he found he could stare point blank into their faces and they'd never notice. He could almost sense it, the weight of something terrible driving them forward, how tightly they interlaced their fingers and how their eyes brightened when Monsignor held up the host and declared, "Body of Christ." And the depth of conviction in their voices, the breath that escaped when they responded, "Amen."

He wondered how many, in the midnight darkness, were awake and afraid like him.

Perhaps most upsetting was the figure who never rose from her knees in the back. When they recessed at the end of mass, he'd glance over at the withered woman, wrinkled and small, and try to look into her face. But it was always bowed.

At the end of his week of service, after mass, Monsignor stepped over to Thomas in the sacristy. He said, "Were you paying attention today?"

"Yes, Monsignor," Thomas answered.

"Tell me something about the gospel."

Thomas searched his memory, but nothing came.

"Which apostle wrote it? Who was the central figure? What was its meaning to you?"

Thomas, crestfallen, could only stare at a BB gun hole in the stained-glass window. Finally he said, "I can't answer. I'm sorry."

"Sorry is an interesting term. Forgiveness is at the heart of Christ's teachings. Do you know that? And each of us needs forgiveness because each of us sins. To be human is to fail, no one escapes that. We fail over and over again. That isn't the question. The question is what you do after you realize your failure."

Thomas thought about what the priest said. He wasn't sure how to respond, and finally he came up with, "Thank you."

The priest nodded, but did not smile.

“Did I do a good job this week?” Thomas asked.

“You’re improving,” Monsignor McGinley told him. “But surely next week you’ll do even better.”

Thomas did a double-take. The priest took a step toward the main part of the church and said, “See you Monday morning.”

On Saturday morning, after watching two hours of cartoons and shoveling snow from the steps while Joseph ran the blower over the sidewalk, Thomas pulled a thick phone book from a kitchen drawer. He flipped through the pages and found that there were six “Gordons” in the city. He wondered which one was Peter’s, and briefly considered calling them all. Since the bathroom incident, he had only caught fleeting glimpses of him in the hallway or cafeteria, and always the pale boy quickly turned away.

On Sunday at the ten o’clock mass, when those in his pew rose from their knees to receive communion, Thomas sat back and made space for the others to pass. His father and brothers shuffled by, and only his mother gave him a questioning look of concern. After his family joined the line in the center aisle, Thomas lowered the kneeler and returned to prayer. He prayed to do better in school, to be more like his brothers. He prayed to make his parents proud. He prayed to be a better altar boy. He prayed to understand why he cried some nights and why he’d been so cruel to Peter Gordon.

At Monday morning Mass, Thomas listened closely to all three readings, which came from Leviticus, Corinthians, and the Gospel according to Luke. Afterwards, he was ready to be quizzed, but no questions came. On Tuesday and Wednesday too, he fought against his early morning drowsiness and concentrated on the words as Monsignor McGinley read them. After Mass each day, the two of them spoke briefly, once about a misstep Thomas had taken, but otherwise about trivial things. The televised launch of a space shuttle for another orbital test flight, the upcoming Superbowl. Thomas was surprised that Monsignor McGinley was a Steeler’s fan.

All week long, he watched as the faithful took communion, wondering with each one about his or her secret sins. A teenage girl appeared one morning, and her hair was dyed a bright shade of red. Thomas could imagine the many things she’d done wrong.

If the monsignor’s words were true, then even the priest, Thomas realized, even the priest himself was wicked in some way. Up on the altar, Thomas found himself mouthing the words, just moving his lips along with

the monsignor, when he begged, *wash away my iniquities, cleanse me from my sins*. And all week long, the tiny woman in the back pew sat in silence, looking to Thomas not just penitent but crumpled, defeated.

In the fall, there had been a change to the mass, something so rare and unexpected it seemed impossible. But, because of some ruling Thomas did not fully understand, it was now permissible to receive communion in your hand and then slip the host into the mouth yourself. When Sister Anita Joseph explained this to the auditorium full of students, it was clear she was offended by the change. But she told them all that you were to hold your left hand cupped under your right, both upturned, and that once you had the host in your palm—which should obviously have been scrupulously cleaned just before mass—you should step to the side, continue to face the altar, carefully pick up the host, and insert it into your mouth with respect and reverence.

Later that same day, Sister Joseph visited each classroom so the students could rehearse this new technique. They practiced with wafers that had not yet been consecrated, with Sister Joseph playing the role of priest.

At mass two days later, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, almost all of the kids received communion in this way, mostly for the novelty Thomas thought. Once the initial excitement passed, about half the younger generation used their hands, but almost all the older folks remained faithful to the old ways.

This is why Thomas was doubly surprised on the Thursday morning of his second week of serving the six thirty morning mass. When the dozen congregants came forward for communion, Thomas saw the withered woman—risen at last from her back pew—shuffling deliberately up the aisle. And not just that, but she had her hands cupped and outstretched.

Monsignor McGinley seemed undisturbed as he lifted the host and offered, like a question, “Body of Christ?”

With her head still dipped, the withered woman said, “Amen,” and extended her cupped hands up to her forehead. Monsignor deposited the host in her wrinkled palm. As she stepped to the side, directly in front of Thomas, Monsignor scanned the pews to be sure no one else was coming forward. But Thomas watched her reach her right hand into the palm where the host was, pinch at the air, and bring an empty hand to her mouth. All the while she stared at the tiled floor. The hand still holding the host quickly

closed and slid down to her pocket, and she kept it there as she turned and went back to her pew. Monsignor strode up to the altar, leaving Thomas paralyzed where he was. There was nothing about this in the Altar Boy's Complete Guide, which by now he'd all but memorized.

Monsignor cleared his throat and drew the boy's attention, and Thomas stiffly returned to his duties. But once the priest had finished at the altar and they'd returned to their cold marble seats, he could contain himself no more. He leaned over and whispered, "Monsignor, that woman—"

"I know," the priest said, keeping his eyes out on the congregation. "She's still here. Let's just finish the mass."

And that is what they did. Only a minute or two later, they were walking down the aisle, past the somber church goers, and heading toward the sacristy where Thomas and the monsignor had their talks after mass. But the priest veered away at the last pew and unexpectedly sat down with the old woman who'd stolen the communion. Thomas, unsure of what to do, retreated to the sacristy and from there he watched everyone else leave the church, almost all of them nervously glancing over at the strange scene in the back pew.

When the priest rose a few minutes later, he turned and motioned for Thomas to come over. "Thomas," he said, "this is Mrs. Cosgrove. I'm going to ask you to sit quietly with her for a moment while I gather a few things. Can you do that for me, please?"

Thomas nodded and sat. Mrs. Cosgrove gave no sign that she knew he was there.

He wondered what her punishment would be, and he wanted to ask her why she'd tried to steal the host.

When Monsignor McGinley reappeared, he wore a winter coat and had Thomas' gripped in one hand. He passed it to him and said, "You'll come with us."

The withered woman rose and said nothing to either of them. She ambled through the vestibule and out into the bitter cold. On the church steps, which had been salted to melt the ice, Thomas stepped forward and offered his arm, but she gripped the black iron railing instead. In silence, Thomas and Monsignor McGinley followed her slow progress through the parking lot that doubled as a playground. It had been plowed and so Thomas could see the hopscotch board as well as the game of Prodigal Son

that had been painted into the asphalt. Even when they reached the back of the parking lot, where there were no cars, the old woman kept walking, and only when she left the lot and turned on the sidewalk did Thomas realize they were walking to her house.

It was two blocks down, a row home one from the end. The painted wood of the front porch flaked, desperate for a new paint job, and a swing hung lopsided, dangling from a single chain. Stacked up along the wall by the door were dozens of newspaper bundles, wrapped in plus signs of twine. The withered woman opened the creaky door and walked through. The priest and the boy followed.

Inside, the air was musty and dark. The antique furniture, ornate carved wood, gold framed photos, reminded Thomas of objects from a museum. As they mounted a staircase, Thomas heard above them an odd sound, a low mechanical hum.

They moved down a thin hallway, toward the rear of the house, and entered a cramped bedroom. Even as he stepped in, Thomas smelled something sour and unpleasant. In the center of the dimly lit room was a man propped up in bed with hospital railings. His face was gaunt and his eyes were fixed directly overhead, so intent and concentrated that Thomas followed his stare to a water-stained ceiling. The stains bubbled out like storm clouds.

“*Perdóname,*” said a woman Thomas hadn’t seen. She rose from a rocking chair by the window and spoke in hushed tones for a moment to the withered woman. Monsignor McGinley moved to the head of the bed and Thomas looked around. On the nightstand, a collection of pill bottles looked like a skyline. In one corner, a purring humidifier huffed steam, and Thomas recalled his mother smearing Vicks Vapo-rub on his chest when he was sick in second grade.

The woman who spoke Spanish excused herself and slipped away, and the withered woman took a position across from the monsignor. The priest motioned to the space next to him and Thomas made his way there, having to bump passed a strange looking chair that was nothing more than a large white bucket with metal rails. It took Thomas a moment to realize its function.

The old woman settled a hand on the man’s bony shoulder. “Franklin,” she croaked, the first word Thomas heard her say. “Franklin, the priest is come.”

The man blinked, as he had been blinking, but did not take his eyes off the ceiling. Thomas thought he might be smiling, but realized it could be his imagination.

"Hello, Franklin," Monsignor McGinley said in a clear voice. "It's Carl McGinley. We met years back, when I officiated at your daughter Jeanie's wedding."

"Jenny," the old woman corrected. She picked up a brush from the nightstand and combed out the man's wispy grey hair.

Thomas looked at the man's mouth, slightly open, and wondered if he had teeth. His whole face seemed on the verge of caving in on itself, so tight was the skin and so sunken the cheeks. The woman reached for a glass of water, held it with one hand, and with her other she inserted an eye dropper, the kind with a big blue bulb on the end. She dipped the eye dropper into the water, tapped it on the side of the glass, then brought it to the man's cracked lips. Perhaps instinctively, he pursed his lips around it and the woman pressed gently. The man licked his lips, worked them with his gums, and then he said the words, "More. . . please."

The woman gave him two more droppers full, and when she finished he turned his head on the pillow and faced Monsignor McGinley. The priest said, "How are you, Franklin?"

Franklin blinked and said, "Well, you're here."

The priest slid a hand through the railing and set it gently on the blanket, over the outline of an arm. "Would you like to pray?"

Franklin nodded, and without blessing himself, he began to recite the Hail Mary in a raspy voice. When Monsignor joined in, Thomas did as well. Together they got through that and an Our Father, but half way through the Apostle's Creed, Franklin fell silent. He shook his head at the lost words. The others finished it for him.

Monsignor slid a hand inside his coat and withdrew what looked to Thomas like a tiny tobacco tin. He said, "I'm going to anoint you now." He unscrewed the top and passed it to Thomas, then dipped a thumb inside the container and brought it to Franklin's forehead. He made the sign of the cross and whispered, then said, "Amen." Thomas repeated it.

Monsignor gave the chrism to Thomas, who put the cap back on, then the priest leaned in close to Franklin's face. "Have you done wrong things in your life, Franklin?"

In the corner of the room, the humidifier wheezed. Almost imperceptibly, the old man nodded.

"And do you regret those acts? You don't need to name them Franklin. That isn't necessary now. Just put them before Jesus. Ask for His forgiveness."

"I'm sorry," Franklin said. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry." He continued to repeat it, and each time he seemed more insistent. It was difficult to watch, but Thomas did not turn away.

Finally the priest patted him on the arm and said, "That's fine, Franklin. That's very good." He lifted two fingers and positioned them over Franklin's face. He drew the sign of the cross in the air and said, "I absolve you of all your sins in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost."

The priest again reached into his coat and pulled out a second tin. From this one, he retrieved a single host. At the sight of it, the woman crossed herself and knelt. With great care, monsignor broke off a tiny splinter and said, "This is the body of Christ." Franklin, staring at the water-stains still, opened his mouth just enough for the tip of his tongue to emerge.

Monsignor placed the sliver on the man's tongue and said to the woman, "Perhaps some more of that water."

She obliged and together the three of them watched Franklin chewing the tiny fragment with great effort. Finally he swallowed. He sighed, then after a few moments of quiet, he focused once more on the ceiling. Again, Thomas thought he saw him smile thinly. "Do you see them?" Franklin asked.

Almost instantly, the priest said, "I do not see them. But I know that they are here." After a moment, he added, "Pray to hear God's will, Franklin. And when you hear it, obey His will. If He calls you to rest, it's alright if you rest. I'll come see you again in a few days, if that's alright?" He looked to the withered woman for an answer, but she was still on her knees, looking down. It occurred to Thomas that she might be crying, or that she might be thinking about what the next few days would surely bring.

They saw themselves out, Thomas following the priest. They heard the Spanish woman running water in the kitchen but did not talk with her. Without speaking to each other, the two of them went back down the broken sidewalk and crossed the church parking lot. At the back door of the rectory, Monsignor McGinley turned to the boy. "Do you have any questions?"

Thomas considered this, then shook his head.



“Very good. Saturday penance service is available from three p.m. till four thirty.”

Thomas nodded. He remembered the cramped darkened chamber, the red cushion of the kneeler, the woven screen and the deep quiet.

“Alright then. Thank you for your help. Go and join your classmates.”

Thomas went down to the cafeteria, where the kids gathered on cold days before classes began. Some were racing around but most sat in groups at the tables. Thomas found Peter Gordon sitting on the stage steps by himself reading a book. Peter lifted his eyes from the book, saw Thomas, then began to scan the auditorium. But Thomas, who had come to apologize to Peter, held up a hand and said, “Don’t worry. I want to ask you a question.”

Peter folded the book on his lap and looked blankly at him. And Thomas leaned in and quietly asked, “Tell me, please. What was making you cry?”

## ALMOND CYCLE

We were teenagers in a small  
town. The neighbors were standing in  
as puppets dangling from their hinges  
to look at us  
to see  
all of this  
in the midst of  
dying. Ukulele  
sounding in the seed  
a mailbox where we strung our  
underwear and leapt naked into  
the street.  
I've always felt  
like you knew how the sand  
moved around my feet when I stepped  
haphazard into traffic, almost as  
if it wanted to hold me back, to keep  
all of this in the glove of time. I wish  
California would  
break off its  
continent. I wish  
there was more I  
could have carved  
into the red slide of the playground  
where we first exchanged our sweat, our palms  
as sycamore leaves  
shivering on a bough. There was  
so much playful darkness  
where we set our bodies loose.  
Only the hollow yellow electric light.

The fog crept in. It was  
sweet like this. We would watch  
the bats screech by, the few  
cars blinding light past us.

— *Lawrence Eby*

KRISTA JENSEN

## THE ORANGE

**O**RANGES TASTE LIKE an old love. Their vivid color catches your eye across the room, just like you caught mine. Grazing my fingers across your imperfect skin that still feels so perfect all at once. But that's all you get at first. Just a touch. You know there's something more worthwhile deeper inside, but you must work to reach it. And it's not as easy as it looks. You must dig in and not be discouraged if your first attempt only peels away a small portion. That's just the start. With the trouble it was to pry that small piece it may not seem worth it anymore. It seems it would take too much effort and energy to get through to what you can only imagine is inside. But there's something that motivates you to continue. With that one small piece also comes the first clue as to what lies ahead. A spritz of thick, musty fragrance hits you like a wall as the evidence of its presence glitters through the air. "He's worth the struggle," you say to yourself. And you continue. And as you continue, you realize that the chipping away at this protectant cover becomes easier and easier, as the pieces grow larger, falling into your palm.

You delve deeper in and you begin to see what lies beneath the thick skin, hiding away from the rest of the world, waiting for someone committed enough to fight. Eventually, all that is left is this ball of vulnerability, separated into slices of its whole being. You find that the tough exterior is mirrored by the leathery skin still fighting hard to protect what's left. However, at the same time, it opens up to you, revealing these slices for you to witness, to touch, to enjoy. Deep within are bulbs of sweet, succulent juice just waiting to burst.

Your first kiss. It sends electricity through your mouth, awakening your taste buds and tickling your throat. His taste invigorates your whole body, tightening your muscles so they are beyond your control for the moment that your lips meet. Your natural inclination is to pucker your mouth and

close your eyes. As he pulls away, he leaves your mouth watering and wanting more. You're infected with his taste and can only be cured by him alone.

Pulling apart each slice makes the sound that your bare thighs make as you peel them from the hot leather of his passenger seat on a sweltering summer night. The juice sticks to your skin like his kisses stick to the nape of your neck, right where it reaches the start of your shoulder.

You continue to indulge in every slice of him, allowing yourself to be satiated by his offerings of nourishment. Every so often, however, you come across the tough seeds that are difficult to overcome because every time you reach for them in hopes of removal, the slimy beads slip from your fingertips. With practice, it becomes easier, but never easy. Until one day you realize that what you thought was once infinite is, in reality, limited. What he has to give could only last so long and all this time you allowed yourself to be distracted by the thrill of his kiss, not knowing that with each bite, you were getting closer and closer to the end. Until, eventually, there is nothing left for him to give. As quick as he came, he is gone. But the taste, the taste that you never quite familiarized yourself with because it caught you off guard every time, lingers on your tongue. Reminding you of what you had. The only problem is that this taste that you used to long for now only makes everything else seem bitter. It taints your ability to experience what anyone else has to offer because they don't even seem to compare. At first, it seems that you'll never be able to rid yourself of what he has stained you with. You feel like nothing will ever come close to making you feel the same way he did. The only cure is time. You realize that his taste slowly starts to relinquish its grasp and you begin to witness once again the splendors of life around you. Until, eventually, he becomes a mere memory, locked away in the depths of your taste buds. Because, in the end, he was only an orange.

## THE REPETITION

is engrained, you indicated  
by returning, by paying the cost  
of staying open, a fluorescent vacancy

sign flickering.

The bulbs are discolored, the  
letters uneven, waiting to be unlit.  
While you wait

you learn to expect less. Many  
holier men have learned to wait  
for direction.

It teaches humility.

You are not humble  
though you expect nothing divine  
and settle for other travelers,

those looking only

for a warm bed and a night's rest.  
The light goes out. Dew settles  
on the parking lot where broken

asphalt has been stitched,

frenetic webbing that spiders  
out to the road.

— *Trenton Pollard*



## GHOST SHIP

DALTON PROVOST

ink on paper — 18" by 24"





IN MY FLESH  
 MARY HELEN MACK  
 mixed media





# GESTALT

TIM DILBECK

acrylic on wood — 24" by 30"



## THE CHESS GAME

QIUZI EMILY LIN

oil on canvas — 24" by 36"

PHILLIP STERLING

## WHAT IS I DON'T KNOW

### WHAT IS I DON'T KNOW

COME FAMILY NIGHT, we herded around the TV. *Jeopardy* was on. The category was “Tails to Tell.” *Timid creatures*, read Alex, *they were said to have demonic and prophetic powers*. Mice, said the yellow horse. What is mice? said the muskrat. You know perfectly well, she replied. Don’t they have to be in the form of a question? asked the muskrat. Don’t what? she said. I laughed. It had been a long time since I’d thought about that old cartoon, the fat mouse and the thin one, their voices an imitation of Abbott and Costello. When I was a kid—, I began. *When* you were a kid? the muskrat interrupted. That’s when the yellow horse stomped from the room. The muskrat shrugged. What’s up with her?

### THE LONG AND THE SHORT OF IT

YOUR MAUDLIN IS my miffed, said the rat. I had stepped on him by accident, his overcoat the color of a curb. Not to mention the two bags of groceries in my arms. Sorry, I said. I’m sorry. May I offer you a ride in recompense? He sniffed, scurried wordless behind the paper box. It’s just as well.

## SHARP KNIVES IN THE DEFT HANDS OF THE VERY SKILLED

WE'LL GO OUT to celebrate, I told the yellow horse. Your choice. Sea food was out of the question. So we tried the new Brazilian place, where the waiters' finesse skewered roasts right at the table, neat cuts on plates continually replaced. Just salad, ordered the yellow horse. No cranberries or walnuts. Vinaigrette on the side. Our waiter hailed from New Jersey, but he sang "Happy Birthday" in Portuguese all the same. It's just as well.

## COCKTAIL HOUR

AFTER I'D FINISHED mowing, we sat on the porch with a couple of Oatmeal stouts. I love what you did with the yard, said the yellow horse, but I no longer love you. I took a sip of the beer; it was bitter. I thought: *A chicken hawk floats over, looking for home.* And that one tree looks dead, she continued. You should probably take it down. Which? I said. The hemlock?



KRISTEN KECKLER

## BRICK BY BRICK

I'VE TALKED MY mom and her first cousin—their mothers were sisters—into taking a ride down to their old neighborhood, Olinville, in the North Bronx. They've both lived in the suburbs for decades—Mom in Westchester and Patty in Long Island. I want to see where my grandmother, the family entrepreneur, had her dress factories in the '50s and '60s, back before textile manufacturing was outsourced to the third world—when local meant a garment sewn in the Bronx would be sold in a Manhattan department store.

It's a crisp October Saturday, and the trees along the Bronx River Parkway are like the stunning redheads of yesteryear.

"Wasn't that a brilliant idea?" Mom says about leaving her Mercedes at her doctor's office in Scarsdale, by the parkway, so I could drop her off afterward for her appointment. She repeats this three times, though Patty and I have already agreed.

"Your mother has no sense of direction for someone so brilliant," Patty quips—Patty's navigating from the backseat.

I ask when Grandma sold the factory—1967. She worked as the forelady afterward until she was in her seventies because, Mom explains, she hadn't been contributing to her social security as a business owner and had no retirement.

"She had to have been putting something into social security, just not enough," Patty corrects. "Plus, she had your father's."

A debate ensues about the entitlement system in general.

"They should put it in a lock box," Mom says, and when I remind her that the politician who coined that term was not the guy she voted for, she waves me away. "They're all crooks."

Patty's craning her neck and tells me, "Take the next exit, Gun Hill Road, then make a left."

As we limp down the congested urban avenue, they announce in unison: "There's Cinquemani's!" The first landmark they notice is a *funeral home*, typical for a couple of Sicilians.

Idling at a light, I snap photos out my window. Some guy across the street starts yelling, and I'm not sure if it's at me—honestly, I don't really care. I've been teaching college classes in the East Bronx for a couple years, so nothing really fazes me in daylight. But Mom and Patty believe his shouts are directed at us, and it's making them nervous.

Across the street is the Immaculate Conception Church, where they were baptized and confirmed, where they confessed pre-adolescent sins and received the body and blood of Christ on their tongues. The church is a sand-colored brick, Neo-Romanesque, with twin towers and topped with slate roofs, crosses. According to Mom, there's a shrine for St. Anthony inside, a place of miracles.

"I prayed at that shrine before I was supposed to abort your sister," she says. (Family lore: the doctor told Mom it was tubal, her life was in danger, and ordered a DNC. After a heart-to-heart with St. Anthony, Mom decided to wait another week, during which it was determined the pregnancy—my younger sister—was viable.)

There's a crowd on the church steps, a line—some sort of soup kitchen. I want to see the shrine, but there's nowhere to park.

They remember a particular funeral, cousin Francine's.

"She married this guy from the other side," Patty says.

"New Jersey?" I ask, stupidly.

"No, Italy," Mom says. "I think it was arranged. Anyway, we walk in, and there she is in the coffin, wearing a mink coat. They buried her in a mink!" she says.

"These were not rich people," Patti says. "They had a football wedding," and before I can ask, she clarifies, "one you can't afford." Patty recalls, "Francie was so dramatic, splayed out in her wedding dress on a lawn chair, and you could see everything, and I mean, *everything*."

I've turned on Magenta Street. "There's the field where my brother Nicky threw his famous game-winning pass," Mom says.

"Did you go to school here?" I ask Patty.

"Yes, but your mother always went to parochial school," Patty says.

"I went to a private all girls academy," Mom corrects.

"Oh, stop it."

We hang another left, and they are quiet, looking out at a mish-mosh of attached row houses, crumbling colonials, and renovated duplexes.

“My father built some of these two-family houses during the boom,” Mom says.

They point out Micheli’s. “That’s where we went to get our photos taken”—for all those Catholic milestones, of course.

We circle around to the building—a simple, brick, squared off U-shape creating a courtyard—where Patty grew up. This is where her mother—Aunt Josey, the last Sicilian holdout—lived in a rent-controlled apartment until she was well into her nineties.

I double park, hop out to take a photo, both of them calling after me to hurry up.

There are two men in their mid-fifties outside, one wearing a Yankees cap. “Hey, you want us to be in your photo? Put us on Facebook?” they joke.

I say, “Aww, you guys. My grandmother lived here,” and they wave as I get back in the car. This is a lie—it was my great aunt, not my grandmother.

“We used to hang out in the courtyard,” Mom says.

“We’d play handball,” says Patty.

Mom’s shading her eyes, looking. “It’s so tiny! As a kid, it always seemed so big.” The cement courtyard could accommodate a large SUV, maybe two.

“It was like a carnival out here in the summer, the people were like homesteaders, staking their claim on the sidewalk with their lawn chairs. Everyone would be playing cards, knitting, talking,” Mom says dreamily.

“It wasn’t like a carnival. It wasn’t that many people. You’re mother doesn’t know what she’s talking about.”

“They never let me play cards. I was too young, I always had to watch.”

“Oh, stop being a baby,” Patty says. “Your mother wasn’t much for knitting.”

“I’d always drop my stitches,” Mom concedes. “I didn’t have the patience.”

We hang a right onto Burke Avenue, and around the corner is a three-story brick walk-up, attached to a nearly identical building, only three windows wide along the front. A barbershop occupies the first floor, and a single skinny tree is rooted in the sidewalk. The tops of the buildings, built in 1920, create a façade effect and rectangular cutouts like a two-dimensional sandcastle, edges that rise like steps. The brickwork around the window forms an arch, a decorative touch.

It’s first time I’ve seen the place where my mom lived until she was five—that would be 1950—and where her two much older brothers (teenag-

ers when Mom was born) grew up.

"I didn't realize you and Mom lived so close to each other," I say to Patty.

"A couple blocks," Patty says, but these are half blocks—a two-minute walk.

"See the fire escape? That was Uncle Joe and Uncle Nicky's room," Mom says.

I'm about to get out to snap a photo, but there is a fight on the sidewalk, two women screaming and posturing, their posses gathering.

"Oh crap, let's get out of here," Mom urges, and so we head over to Grandma's first factory on Holland Avenue. (Months later, I'll catch the headline "Man Found Dead in Burning Car," and notice the address is two streets away.)

First my grandmother rented this one-story building—the stucco like vanilla icing—and then expanded next door. Above a large industrial metal garage door, like for a loading dock, a sign now reads: *Iglesia Camino de Santidad*. I find a legit parking spot and coax the two of them out for a photo in front. They look like sisters—petite, dark cropped hair, (Mom's jet black, Patti's auburn), red lipstick—chattering away, mouths open like jack-o-lanterns.

"Stop talking and smile!"

A dreadlocked young man leads a pit bull on a chain fit for a lion, and Mom and Patty scamper to the car. The dog squats near my rear tire, and the guy tries to get the dog to the corner, but the dog seizes up—when you gotta go, you gotta go—and I see him fish around in his pocket, taking out a plastic bag so he can clean up.

"Patty's terrified of dogs," Mom says.

"I don't care much for dogs," Patty says.

I turn under the elevated subway—"the El" they both call it.

"That was our stop. I'd wait for Grandpa to come down those very stairs, from his construction jobs," Mom says of the Burke Avenue station for the #2 and #5 subways. "There was an ice cream parlor here, and on Valentine's Day, the window display would be full of all these beautiful satin hearts."

"Grandma used to give me money for ice cream. Ten cents a scoop," Mom continues. "Aunt Josey ran a tighter ship—Patty could only have one ice cream per week. I could have as many as I wanted."

"Your mother was spoiled," Patty tells me.



“So she’d always ask me for a taste, and I’d make her promise to take a tiny lick on one spot, and then she’d lick all the way around the whole friggin’ cone.” Mom mimes a lascivious lick. “And I’d get disgusted and just give it to her. I always believed her,” Mom says, turning around in her seat.

I look in the rearview mirror, Patty’s mischievous smirk.

“I hate to tell you but you only did one eyebrow this morning,” Patty says. “You’re gonna go to the doctor with one eyebrow?” she teases, and Mom pulls down her mirror—it’s true, she’s penciled one dark, the other a phantom twin.

Mom starts cackling hysterically.

On White Plains Road, along the El, there’s a row of one-story attached businesses with colorful vinyl awnings; in the background, there’s nondescript mid-rise tenements and the zigzag scaffolding of fire escapes. I’ve heard there are some Art-Deco style gems in the Bronx on the Grand Concourse, but there’s nothing like that here.

They’re both talking at once.

“Remember the Kosher deli?”

“The ravioli place?”

“The soda fountain?”

“Italian pastries?”

“There was a five and dime...”

“The hairdresser where I used to get permanents—what was it called?” Mom asks.

“Tony’s.”

“That supermarket was there,” Mom points, “but it was a Safeway.”

“That was never a supermarket,” Patty says.

“Yes it was, it’s where I bought yogurt for my brother. Your memory’s worse than mine,” Mom shoots over her shoulder.

“That was a Chinese place,” Patty squints. “What is it now?”

“Caribbean food,” I say.

“They love to double park in the Bronx,” Mom observes.

I remember my grandmother taking me down here—not here, exactly, probably Arthur Avenue, where all the Italian grocers still are—for pizza and Italian ices. She spoiled me, too. I remember the train overhead, click-ety-clanking, the massive steel supports in the middle of the road like an obstacle course.

"Where was Uncle Batista's deli?" I ask.

"Queens," Patty says.

"Have you lost your mind, Pat? Second Avenue," Mom says, adding, "You don't know anything about the Pizzurros." (Grandpa's side.) "Stick to the Sapienza's and Macaroni's."

"Oh, there's the old Mani Hani," Patty says.

"What's a Mani Hani?" I ask.

"Manufacturer's Hanover. It's now a Chase," she says. "Allerton Avenue was always the business hub because there was a bank."

"And the movie theater where we used to go," Mom says.

"I remember the last movie I saw there. *Gone with the Wind*," Patty says.

"See, at least you remember something."

We come to the second factory (it looks like the one on Holland except with three garage doors) my grandmother owned—the business, not the building—on Allerton Avenue. Grandma employed the whole family.

"My father was a presser," Patty said.

"Aunt Josey was the best seamstress. She was so precise."

"Aunt Jenny was the sloppy one," Patty says.

Though my grandparents moved north to the suburbs—Yonkers—by then, my mother went to Catholic school in the Bronx and came to the factory in the late afternoons and in the summers. The factory had a double basement, (my grandfather even had a small section where he fermented homemade wine) and a huge table where Mom and Patty would entertain themselves playing fashion designer: cutting fabric and sewing buttons. (Patty's retained these skills—I've asked her, not Mom, to mend several coats for me over the years.) Sometimes they were put to work, putting tags on the finished clothes—"tags with the brand and sizes," Mom says, and snipping loose threads off dresses. It was damp down there, and loud—the ever-present rumble of sewing machines overhead.

"Remember the matches, Pat?" Mom asks, giggling. "I really threw you under the bus that time."

"She always blamed me for everything. I was the little devil and your mother was the angel," Patty rolls her eyes.

They were in the basement, and there was a tin of matches. They lit a few, just to watch them burn. "Then your Uncle Nick came down and smelled sulfur," Mom says. "I lied through my teeth, said it was Patty's idea."

I remember because a week later, at my brother's wedding, they were all trying to get me to confess and promised me a present."

"Patty got in big trouble," Mom says, with a guilty smile. "Sorry, Pat."

"Do you remember?" I ask.

"Not particularly," Patty says. "You can write that I got a beating. The wooden spoon. That's when parents were allowed to hit their kids."

We've circled back around to Mom's first apartment, and the sidewalk cat-fight has escalated. A cop car has arrived on the scene, lights spinning.

■            ■            ■

We're cruising along Bronx Boulevard, which borders an emerald strip of park, and Patty points out Aunt Mary's building, a dozen stories with teal-colored tiles around the entrance. "I remember the balconies. They were brand-new back then." The balconies are slabs of concrete surrounded by white mesh squares. "Aunt Mary used to stand barely dressed on this corner, smoking her cigarettes," she says.

"She was nuttier than a fruitcake," Mom says, "always thought of herself as an artist. Sometimes I wonder how I turned out so normal," Mom muses.

"You're not normal," Patti and I both say, laughing.

"My psychiatrist says I am," Mom says, a little too triumphant.

"When it was nice out, we'd ride our bicycles to your mother's house in Yonkers and climb in the window, have some water," Patty says.

"It was our little rebellion. They didn't know where we were going, and didn't care, as long as we were out of their hair. We'd ride in this park here, along the Bronx River."

"No, Bobbi, we're on the other side. We rode through the streets and cut over at the cemetery on Webster Avenue," Patti corrects.

Mom waves her hand, whatever. "Her bike was a raspberry color. I always liked hers better," Mom says.

"Wow, that must be four, five miles," I say. "How long did it take?" I ask.

"Who remembers? It look a little while," Patti says.

"How old were you?" I ask.

"Twelve?" Mom guesses.

"Probably around ten," Patti says. "That was when they were in the new factory, so maybe younger, maybe nine."

"It was probably less congested, less cars," I say.

"Yes, it was sort of like the country," Mom says.

“You’re crazy, it was never like the country,” Patti says. Then, “You know, I never thought of myself as poor, really. We made do, and that’s just the way it was.”

■            ■            ■

As we merge back onto the parkway, Mom sighs, “Everything’s so different now. Sometimes I wish things could stay the same.”

It isn’t until later that I think to myself, well, the church, the funeral home, the high school, the factories, the apartment buildings, the El, the streets, the fire escape, the park—these all remain as physical places they can still look at, imagining the way they’d been, conjuring people and experiences.

“It’s funny how some things I remember so clearly, but other things I second guess as if I wasn’t even there,” Mom says.

“Memories are like that. You have five people at the same event, and each person’s going to remember it a little differently,” Patty says.

“True,” my mother says.

Finally, something they can agree on.

## ARM WRESTLING WITH HEMINGWAY

A battle of grips and wits,  
our elbows slip against  
a slick bar, wet  
with drips of sweat, liquor  
and spritz of spit  
from pursed lips.

He said “courage  
is grace under pressure.”  
I forage for this courage  
in my wrist, before it snaps  
from the pressure applied by  
his grappling which won’t desist.

Gritting my teeth I squeeze  
his burly mitt. Reddening face,  
shaking knees. He chuckles, a tease,  
the back of my hand eases toward the oak.  
Knuckles crack the lacquered timber. He stands,  
orders another drink, while I nurse my bruising fingers.

— *James Freitas*

# COMES WINTER

Comes winter; comes winter;

Too early; too late  
Turns leafs too soon;  
Trades suns for moons.

Comes winter; comes winter;

*Requiescat in pace.*  
Smokey  
Coals to grey ice  
Cold autumnal bride  
Veiled while  
Pale faced  
Draped in moonnight  
Unrequite.

Comes winter; comes winter;

— *m.f. nagel*





# CLOUDS, WATER, AND MIND

DAVID VERBA

mixed media — 30" by 20"



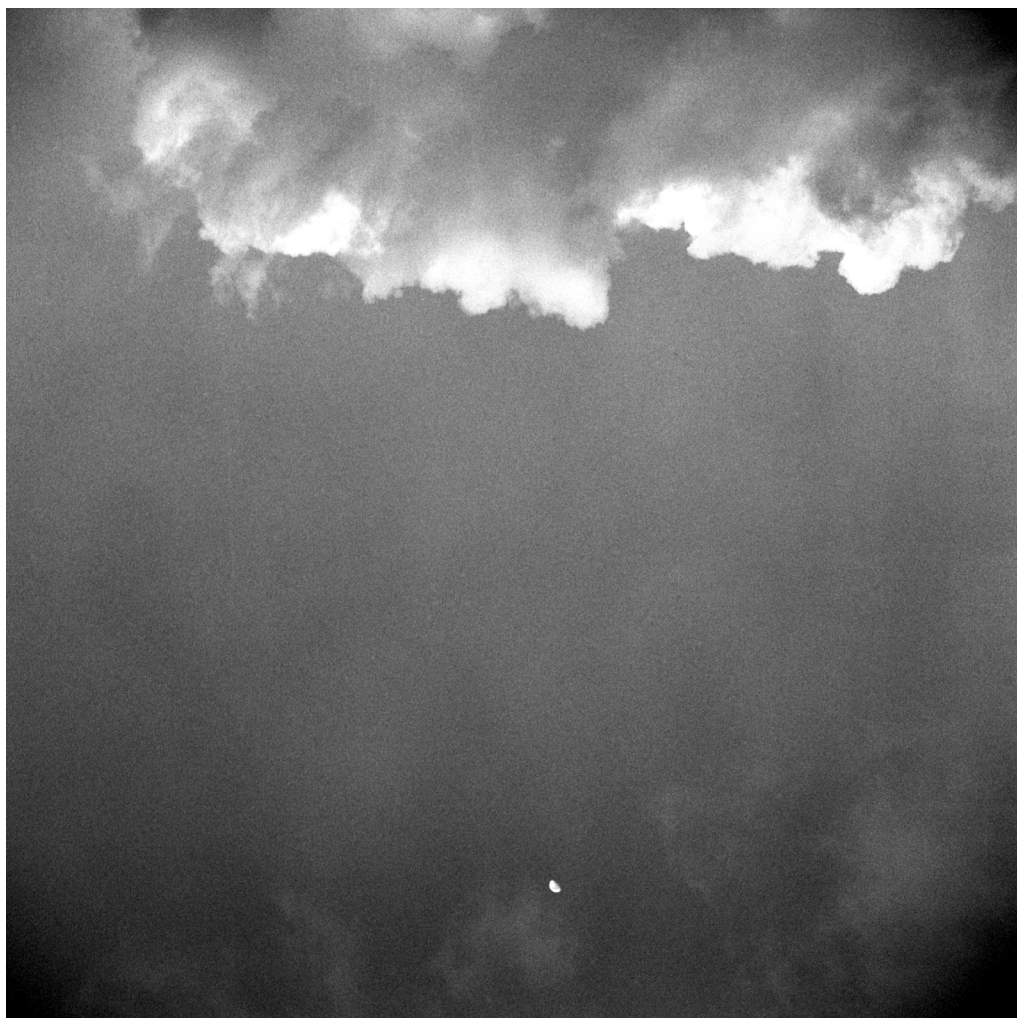


## WOMAN AND HOUSE ON FIRE

DAVID VERBA

mixed media — 20" by 22"





LOOKING UP  
JOE PROUDMAN  
film photography



## MUCHA INSPIRED

SHANNON PRICE

acrylic — 18" by 24"

# CAPTURE, ESCAPE

## I. Moving Day

Moving into the new house, the back door  
open to the porch, yard, the torrential  
rain, I pulled glasses from wet boxes, saw  
a hummingbird skipping among the still  
fan blades. I stood, reached toward the ceiling, caught  
its minute body, wings quivering against  
my palms. I took it outside, let it reel  
into the drenched arms of the mulberry.  
Who knew what life would come into this house;  
what life would leave. How could I know my coming  
escape. The first days carrying my tumors  
through the house, I made each step gingerly.  
At night I told my children this story:  
I will leave for three days; I will return.

## II. Hospital

I'm wearing two robes and my socks waiting  
for a CT scan. It's cold in the hall  
where I'm lying alone on a gurney.  
The man who brought me here said he could see  
my underwear. Morphine blurs the prayer  
I've been saying and why I want it said.  
I believe, instead, he's an asshole. Though,  
he can't know what they've done—the surgeons  
and nurses—how they've opened my body,  
removed the encroaching masses, left me  
rebuilt, stitched, stapled. In the CT room,  
I see the scanner is a gaping eye;  
it fills the room with its searching and turns  
me—in the dim light, in the cold—to images.



### III. Evening

A mass of dry leaves, now red, now orange,  
blue gaps of sky above them and a swath  
of earth converging. The evening started  
at the kitchen window, each slim tree became  
a muddy blur in the damp glass. What we  
thought was the nearing weight—my illness, my  
death—was something else altogether.  
It was evening, the walnut was bare, the ground  
scattered with its leaves. At the fence we could  
see where my disease had come to give itself  
up and I went out. I took it—feint, ghost—  
knelt down, made it a body of mud  
and tucked its mass into the wood poppies  
and ferns, under root and rock; there was rest.

### IV. MRI

When these scans are over, I have a headache,  
my mouth is dry and my hands sting where they  
ran the IVs. Under the sun and blurred clouds  
I find my car, buy coffee and a scone,  
drive away through the sprawling suburban  
terrain: strip malls, chain restaurants. In my body's  
landscape, it's tumors that grow, or don't grow.  
We watch their white forms in each MRI  
holding our breath. Like my children hiding,  
they're hushed, each heart beating a quick thrum,  
waiting to be found, wanting to be known.  
I consider their blindness, the dark field  
on which they build, cell upon cell, the ease  
of their wakefulness, my catastrophe.

## V. Woods at Dawn

At the edge, the early light still on us,  
dark begins further in, night on flowers.  
Or, the morning's not quite catching the trees.  
In the clearing, the flowers've gone wild,  
rampant in their blooming. Each slim tree's  
a muddy blur, each body scattering  
as birds turning—a widening thrall, these  
leaves. If only this was our waking life;  
the swath of earth at our knees, our faces  
full of light. But we're hollow, sleeping; our  
heads heavy against the wind's wild thrum.  
We scatter as birds in a house, settling  
against the kitchen window's damp glass.  
It's the morning coming on. It must be.

— *Clare Banks*

LOUIE LAND

## SEPTEMBER

**I**CARVE A SWASTIKA into the top of my desk and they tell me to go home early, not that I'm complaining. I only expected to get out of Pre-Calculus for a while, go to the office, talk to the guidance counselor, Mr. Henninger. He was busy though, in meetings or something, so they just sent me home but before they did, Mrs. Wentz, my old witch of a PreCalc teacher, chewed me out real good. She kept asking me if I understood what I'd done, kept asking me if I'd meant it, kept asking if I knew what the swastika meant. Adolf Hitler was a lunatic, and I think Mrs. Wentz expected me to argue with her. I didn't. I mean, I know it's a touchy subject, but I pretended to not know what the big deal was. If you defend yourself, say drawing a swastika is ok, then you're wrong, and you're the bad guy and they can argue with you. If you agree that Adolf Hitler was fucked up and draw a swastika anyway, don't try to explain it, don't understand what's wrong, then you're crazy, and if you're lucky like me, you get sent home, referral-in-hand for the next day to the guidance office. Not that going to the guidance office will do much good.

Outside in the parking lot, the sun is shining and the breeze is warm. I'm supposed to meet up with Steve and Jimmy after school, but there's a good hour and a half left until they get out, time for me to do whatever. So I drive my truck a half-mile down the road to the Sunoco station and buy a pack of Marlboros and a newspaper. I don't usually read the paper, but you feel intellectual and educated picking one up. If I'd thought this through, I would have brought my waders and my rod and some tackle and walked out into the creek in the woods along the high school, but I hadn't gone into school planning on going home early. Dad's home from one of his routes, probably sleeping, so I can't go home and shoot target. I'd seen his rig parked in front of the house when I left, I guess he'd gotten home sometime in the middle of the night. I light up a cigarette and kick outside the Sunoco for a little while, watching people pull in and fill up and pull out. I've been out ten minutes and already the afternoon doesn't feel as open. I

guess this is what freedom feels like. In the end figure I might as well drive back to the high school and sit and wait. Not a whole hell of a lot else to do out around here on a Wednesday afternoon in September.

I drive up the road, up the hill, up the school's driveway, downshifting and giving it a little gas. The seventy-year-old traffic guard who's been here since my folks went to school is already wearing his orange vest but he's sitting in a lawn chair down at the ambulance dispatch smoking a cigarette with the EMTs on duty. He waves, not because he knows me, but because that's how it is. I give him a honk on my horn.

I park my truck behind the school. Through the windshield I see a gym class up the hill, on one of the practice fields, playing a game of ultimate Frisbee. The usual kids are throwing their bodies into the game, which is a damn stupid thing to do for a gym class sport. The kids who were too lazy to bring gym clothes are walking laps around the practice field. Steve's up there, one of the dumbasses diving for every catch he can. He sees me pull in and he waves. I stick my arm out the window and give him the finger. He does the same then he's back to his game. I grab my newspaper off of the front seat and slide out of the truck. I'd get running boards along the sides but I'd rather not feel like a candy-ass. The asphalt is warm under my sneakers but not cooking. It's football season, so I've got a lawn chair in the truck box, ready for the home game in two days, and I grab it. I'll set it up on the football field and sit around and read. One of the Key Ices in the old man's fridge would be nice, or even a Hard Ice Tea like my mom drinks, a sunny day like today, but I work with what I've got, which is more or less nothing besides the newspaper and the chair.

There's usually a chain across the ticket booth into the football stadium, not that someone couldn't step over the chain or even climb the fence if they wanted to get in. But the chain's unlatched. I look over my shoulder. The gym class is up on the practice field, everyone supervised. There shouldn't be anybody down here.

Then I catch sight of the guy. He's in a wheelchair. He's rolling around the gravel track that circles the field. He's out at the other end, rolling past the far field goal post, and I don't think he's seen me. I already know I don't know him. Not that I can tell who he is, but you don't see many folks in wheelchairs around here. Not a whole lot of farm or auto body work you

can do in a wheelchair. And there's a lot of hills. I guess they all move out to a place like Kansas where it's flat.

I look down the hill at the guy as he rolls around. He looks pretty big up top. Big shoulders. Short hair. He's wearing one of those gray t-shirts with ARMY STRONG on the front. I don't know any veterans and I feel like it would be a waste to go down and talk to this guy. He'd probably try and get me to join the service. But I can't help watching him as he makes his passes. He's really pushing himself. Rolling around and around.

I can't stand here forever but for some reason I watch him pass more times than it seems I should. I don't know how you could go in circles like that. Let alone watch it. But I do. I smoke a cigarette and stand by the ticket booth and then light up another. He goes around the track, over and over, not going anywhere but working hard anyway. I don't know why but it's funny to me.

Eventually, I tell myself I can't sit down there now. I've been watching him too long. I couldn't set up my lawn chair and read my paper and ignore him and even if I could, he's probably seen me staring by now, and he would strike up a conversation. I pass my lawn chair to my other hand and turn around and walk back to my truck, forgetting this guy and his wheelchair.

I throw the chair over the side and into the bed, then pop the end gate and sit down. Clouds pass overhead now and again. The shade is nice. I unfold the newspaper, but there's nothing much going on that I care about. Politics and war, drugs and more war. When things go south. I don't care much for the sports or local news, either. Local news is usually about the Boy Scouts holding a bake sale or something. I got nothing against the Boy Scouts, but that's not news. These aren't our stories, because we don't have stories, not in the way most people understand stories. Folks around here go to work, drink beer and go to bed. Then they do it again the next day, and again. Those are our stories, I guess, and they're not much of stories to tell.

I set the paper down and climb out of the bed and get a pencil out of the cab. I don't draw, I'm no artist, but I like doing little sketches of nothing. A couple of lines and a little shading. They're pretty formless. My first drawing is a blocky looking building that's kinda tilted lopsided. It looks like shit. I crumple up that page and start over. I start with something that's a little like an eagle's beak, but the beak is too long and I do the head wrong and it looks more like the outline of a flamingo. I try to mirror it, draw the



opposite just to see if I can, and then it looks like I've drawn a goddamn M. Who draws an M? What does that mean? I crumple that one up, too. Why can't I draw something more than that?

The drawing keeps going like this. I keep throwing them out. I can't seem to make anything that's worth a damn. I never care any other time, usually just draw lines and shapes and patterns and I'm fine with it. It's never mattered what it looks like or what it means. Today, for some reason, I feel like trying to draw something half-decent, that means something, but I give up after a half-dozen tries. Fuck it. They're just sketches anyway. I pick up the newspaper again, spread it over my face and try and doze off because there's nothing else to do.

■   ■   ■

I wake up to someone poking me in the arm, my back stiff, my neck sore. I brush the newspaper away. Steve's leaning against the edge of the truck, tossing a football into the air. Jimmy's sitting on the end gate, poking me with a stick. Behind him, the sun is hanging a little lower in the sky and the breeze has died.

"Rise und shine, Hitler," Steve says in a fake German accent. I bend forward and touch my fingers to my toes and shuffle off of the gate. Jimmy follows. With no weight on it, the truck body rises a few inches.

Jimmy says, "Way to get an afternoon off school. And you got out of Pre-Calculus. I hear Mrs. Wentz was furious."

"She was not a ray of sunshine at the time, no," I say.

"You're an inspiration to slackers everywhere."

"But you drew a swastika, so now you're a Nazi," Steve says. "You win some, you lose some. Sorry, Dean."

"Fuck you guys," I say. "I didn't do it because I hate Jews or some shit. I've never even met a Jew."

"You got a point," Jimmy says. He pulls out a pack of Marlboro Lights. "Smoke?"

"Not as long as you're smoking little bitch cigarettes," Steve says. He tosses his football up again and catches it and pretends to out-juke an invisible defenseman.

"You're an asshole," Jimmy says, and offers me the cigarettes.

"Free is free," I say. I spin the wheel on my Bic and light up.

Steve passes the ball hand to hand around his body like a basketball player. “I guess in the end, Dean, you’ve landed yourself a trip to the guidance office. That will be fun.”

“Tomorrow,” I say, “I get to see somebody. Hopefully I get out of English.”

“Half of the afternoon off and no English the next day?” Steve says. “No way you’re that lucky.”

“Though swastikas,” Jimmy says, “that’s pretty racist. It might go on your permanent record.”

“I don’t care,” I say, “I’m not smart enough to go to college.”

“Fair enough,” Steve says. We stand around quietly and smoke our cigarettes for a few minutes. I glance over at the football field, through the chain-link fence. The Army guy in the wheelchair is gone. I start to wonder about him. Maybe he was wounded in the Middle East. But I stop thinking about it. It’s not like he was a friend.

We finish our cigarettes and throw the butts on the ground. We don’t bother to stomp them out. It’s asphalt.

“I don’t know,” I say eventually. I stuff my hands in my pockets and look at the school. “Did you see some of the shit that was on that desk? All kinds of shit. ‘Fuck you’ and ‘Wentz sucks cock’ and stuff. I don’t get it.”

“Write what you want,” Steve says. “One picture and you’re a racist.”

“Yeah,” I say, “Well, fuck them.”

Jimmy asks, “So we got a plan for today or what?”

Steve throws up the football. “I figured we’d throw around for a little while. You know. Be athletic young men.”

“Sounds good.”

We walk back to the football stadium. It’s football season, but the team practices up on the practice fields during the week to keep the grass healthy. Sometimes the field hockey team sets up goals in the football stadium for their games, but they’re playing away today and the field is ours.

We walk fifteen or twenty paces apart and start throwing. Steve started at quarterback on the pee-wee and middle school teams until eighth grade, so he still wears a pair of gloves like it matters. He can put some zip on the ball, and he throws his passes low. Jimmy and I have never done anything more physical than gym class; it’s an act of God we’re not fat. We drop most of the early passes until our palms get used to the sting of the leather.

"There was a guy in a wheelchair earlier," I say, pointing around the track. "He was doing laps."

"Really?" Steve lets another pass fly and Jimmy drops it.

"Christ!"

"Yeah," I say. "Some veteran, I think."

"Old guy?" Jimmy picks up the ball and lofts it my way. The spiral is sloppy but I catch it. "Like, one of the vets you see in all the parades wearing their hats and stuff?"

"No. Like maybe thirty. He looked pretty big. He was wearing one of those Army shirts you see those guys wear."

"Huh." The ball goes to Steve and he fires another cannon. Jimmy lets it whiz by.

"Jesus, asshole, you'd think you were under the blitz," he says.

"If you weren't such a bitch you'd catch the ball," Steve says. Jimmy laughs and goes jogging after the ball. He lobs it back to Steve, who sends a pass my way, though he doesn't throw it as hard anymore. I actually catch it.

"I could ask Dick if he knows the guy," Jimmy says. "Sounds like the type to drop into the VFW at least once in a while." Jimmy's stepfather Dick had been some type of police officer in the Army. When they were at a base in Germany, Berlin or Munich or Vienna or somewhere way out there, Dick had been a cop. He broke up fights between the soldiers and busted them for drugs and stuff like that. When they were sent out to the godforsaken desert, Dick and the other cops served with those men they'd patrolled, but they went on separate missions with other Army cops. I didn't quite get it. Dick was a state trooper now. He liked to tell lots of stories without much explanation. He'd give us beer and talk about the time some guy was loaded with every type of drug imaginable and dropped dead as he tried to pass through the front gate. And that was the whole story. Jimmy hated him but Steve liked him because he wanted to be a state trooper, too.

"It's weird we've never seen the guy before," I say, "I mean, between football season and being out and around, you get to know a lot of guys in the valley by face. Especially someone who sticks out, like a guy in a wheelchair."

Jimmy decides to try and punt the ball. It flies high into the air. Steve backpedals, catches it with a grunt, tucks it into the crook of his right arm and takes off up the field with a "WHOO." We don't bother to chase him.

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I don't get called into the guidance office until around 11 the next day, so I miss homeroom instead of any legitimate class. Jimmy and Steve and this big sophomore we call the Cannonball because he's over 300 pounds are pissed that they are now a man short for our homeroom Euchre game, but maybe a trip to Henninger's office will be better than the usual grind for a day.

Henninger's office door is wide open and he's sitting at his desk, typing. He doesn't have the overhead light on, but there's a desk lamp glowing next to his computer and another standing lamp against the wall. It's not dark, but the room feels sedated, nicer than the white ceiling lights in the classroom. I rap my knuckles on the door and Henninger turns in his chair.

"Hey, William," he says. He's middle-aged, I guess. Clean shaven, nice haircut. Button-down shirt and dress pants. He looks like an adult. He stands up and reaches out his hand. "We've never actually met, so, nice to meet you."

I shake his hand. "Hi."

He waves towards a seat near the wall. I sit down and he goes back to his desk chair and turns it so he can face me. "Do you go by William? Will? Bill?"

"I go by Dean," I say. William is my father's name. Dean's my middle name.

He nods. "Ok, Dean." He folds his hands on his lap. "How are you?"

"Fine," I say.

"Good." Part of me expects him to pull out a yellow legal pad and jot down everything I say, but he sits there and watches me. I shift in my seat and glance at the door, not because I'm uncomfortable but because maybe I can make him think that. Henninger picks up on it and says, "You went home early yesterday, didn't you?"

"Yeah. They made me. I mean, I was happy to have the time off, but, you know." I shrug.

"What did you do when you went home yesterday?"

"Read the newspaper. Took a nap. Threw a football."

Henninger nods again. "It sounds like a productive day. Do you usually read the paper?"

I snort. I can't help myself. "No. I don't like it."

"No, there aren't many happy endings, are there?"

I don't have anything to say.

"Dean, I want to ask you about the swastika you drew yesterday."

Well, that's why I'm here. "Ok."

"I'm curious as to why you did it."

"I don't know."

"Ok." Henninger clears his throat. "You know, back during World War II, when the Holocaust took place, my father was a high school principal. If you'd drawn a swastika on a desk then, you probably would have been caned and then they would have made you write one hundred lines on the blackboard after school."

"Ok."

"I don't think that would have been good for you. Honestly, I don't think you hate Jews. Or believe that what Hitler did was right."

"Maybe. I don't know why I did it. I just did."

Henninger takes a look at me and tilts his head to the side. I shift in my chair again. This time I'm actually uncomfortable. I'm not sure what he's looking at. Not that I'm worried. There's a long pause and I can hear the buzzing of the lightbulb in the lamp. Henninger leans back in his chair and the leather squeaks.

"What are you doing after high school?" Henninger asks.

"What?"

"Do you have any plans for after you graduate?"

I shake my head. "No."

"Any ideas about what you want to do?"

"No." As an afterthought, I add, "It's only September."

"Hmm." Henninger starts with the nodding again. Why the nodding? Is he happy that I haven't thought about this? "What are you good at?"

"Shooting?" I say. I think about drawing but I'm not good at it, and I only draw for myself. Shapes, shades. They've never meant anything until now. Before, they just gave my mood some kind of form in the real world.

"I want you to think about it," Henninger says. "What do you like to do? Give it some real thought. What could you see yourself doing in five years? We'll talk about it next week."

We both sit there for a few seconds. Henninger smiles a little.

"That's it?" I ask.

"That's it for now," Henninger says. "Dean, I think you're fine. But you

drew that swastika for a reason. I can't help but thinking that the reason was that you didn't have a reason. Or a purpose, maybe. So let's talk again next week. Let's see what you can figure out about yourself."

He stands up and opens the door and reaches out his hand. "It was a pleasure meeting you, Dean."

I shuffle back to homeroom, my ears ringing, the back of my neck hot. I feel dismissed. You draw a swastika on a desk and the guidance office asks you what your career plans are? Goddamnit. Not that I wanted to get tied up in a straight jacket and sent to the juvenile center, but still. I feel like I'm being laughed at behind my back. *Goddamn it.*

There are only a few minutes left in homeroom. I shuffle my feet and kick around in the hallway until the bell rings. Jimmy and Steve shoot out the door first in the rush to lunch and they don't see me. I wait for the surge to pass, hear the hall monitors yell, "No running!"

I wander into the empty classroom, pick up my bag, and head slowly to lunch. When I get back to the main hall, the lunch crowd has already gone and so are the hall monitors. I shoulder my pack and walk towards the cafeteria, but cut down the south hallway at the gym. The halls are quiet, except for the dull roar of everyone in the cafeteria. I take the rear door to the back parking lot.

The sun is high in the sky and the light shines off of the cars and I shield my eyes. I stand out in the sunshine and breathe for a few minutes. I'm not angry at Henninger anymore. I feel hollow. I take a cigarette out of my pocket and light it. My nerves cool down as I inhale and the smoke fills the empty spaces. I stand and I wait. Steve and Jimmy and me were gonna go out to my place and shoot pistol after school, or I could go down to the Sunoco station and pick up another newspaper, but there's nothing in the paper worth reading and I don't feel like driving anywhere. I feel like walking, moving, going.

I head down to the track and there he is again. Wheelchair guy. Rolling around in circles. I watch him make another lap, and then I walk down to the track. I want to talk to him. I don't know why.

He rolls closer and I can see him pretty well now. He's built big above the waist, the sleeves of his gray t-shirt tight against his arms, but his legs are chicken-leg thin. He's wearing another one of those ARMY STRONG t-shirts, this one black. He's got a buzz cut. I was right when I guessed his

age. Not a lot of lines on his face. He's probably right around thirty. He stops his chair in front of me and folds his arms.

"Afternoon," he says. His breathing is shallow. His shirt is damp with sweat around the neck.

"Afternoon," I say. I didn't figure on how much taller I would be than him.

He glances at my backpack then back up to me. "Skipping out?"

"Yeah," I say. "Waiting around until my friends get out."

I don't mention the swastika. I know a lot of folks around here have families who served before them, and I don't need this guy chewing me out for being insensitive to what his father fought against. Especially since I'm not even sure why I did it, aside from getting out of school.

"You a veteran?" I ask. He nods and pulls out a set of dog tags, but he doesn't take them off for me to see, he holds them up and then stuffs them back into his shirt. "Sergeant Raymond C. Vandusen. Ray." He leans forward with his hand outstretched. I shake it.

"Dean Hauserman." I don't have anything prestigious to add to my name, so I say, "I'm a senior."

"Going to college?"

The way he asks it, he doesn't get under my skin the way Henninger did. Seems like he's being polite.

"Hadn't thought about it," I lie.

"Doing the service?"

"Hadn't thought about that, either."

Ray laughs. "Sounds like you've got your life in order, huh?"

I shrug and say again, like I told Henninger, "It's only September."

We talk for a few more minutes. I don't ask him why he's in a wheelchair. I figure it's a sensitive subject. He says he did a lot of mechanical work in the Army, and that he'd only been in for a few years before his injury. He says he lives at home, in an apartment half a mile from where his folks live, and he gets a check from the Army every month, which gets him by. "If you have any questions about the service, let me know," Ray says. "I'll be happy to talk to you. I'm here pretty much every day. Don't have a whole lot of other places to go, so, you know, I work out." He gestures at the track.

"Right," I say

We both get real quiet.

“Well, I guess I’ll see you later,” he goes.

“Take care,” I go. He pushes off and rolls away. I watch his back for a few seconds, hear the tires roll on gravel. I don’t know what to do. I want to watch him but I feel like I can’t, not since we’ve said we’re going our separate ways. I walk back up to my truck and sit in the cab and wait, until I figure I’ve got nowhere to go and nothing to do but wait for the guys.

■                    ■                    ■

“That’s fucked up.”

Jimmy pulls the trigger quick, nine times fast and blows about five clays to hell. “Fuck.” He drops the clip out of the grip and lets the pistol dangle from his pointer finger and holds it out to Steve. “There you go, cowboy.”

Jimmy picks up the box of clays and wanders the twenty paces out to the dirt mound in the backyard to set up more targets. Steve waits until Jimmy gets back behind him, out of the line of fire, then slips another clip into the bottom of the grip and aims. He’s always got great posture since he wants to be a cop. He cups his left hand under his right and bends his elbows for stability. He squeezes off his shots real slow and hits nine out of nine clays. Jimmy rolls his eyes.

“Christ, you remind me of Dick. Mr. Safety.”

Steve hands Jimmy the gun. Jimmy jams in the clip, stands with his right side towards the mound, raises his right hand, and grabs at the trigger nine times. He shatters a clay with the first shot and misses the rest. Puffs of dust shoot up from the mound. Jimmy lowers his arm. “Fuck.”

“You showed them, Clint Eastwood,” I say.

“Motherfuck you and John Wayne,” Jimmy says. He hands me the gun.

We don’t shoot pistol real often, but the old man is out on another route, so he’s gonna be gone for a few days at least, and my mother is working another double at the drug store. There’s nobody to bother with our after school shooting. The .22 pops more than anything else when you pull the trigger, but the old man would probably tan my hide if he were around and I went out shooting while he were home, because he’d be sleeping. Not that he’d wake up. It’d more be a thing done out of principle.

“It’s still fucked up,” Jimmy says as I step up to shoot. “Henninger has you meet with him so you can talk about your future plans?”

I take a few shots. The mound isn’t that far out, and if I took my time, I could hit every target easily. I try to rush my shots a little and get six clays



for nine shots. Since I got home I've been thinking about what Henninger said, about finding a career. I like to shoot and I'm good at it. Ray mentioned joining the service and said I could ask him about it. I'm not crazy about the idea of fighting in a war. Not that I have a problem with fighting, it's just that I would probably just as soon turn my back on whatever we were fighting for. I probably wouldn't belong there, but I like to shoot and it would be a chance to do something. When I got back the house I set up the clays and instead of waiting for the guys I started shooting and thought about what it might be like to be a soldier.

I pull the clip and hand the gun over to Jimmy.

"It's not mornings off," I say. "I don't know what we're gonna do. It'll probably be a once a week thing. I don't know. I still hope it's during English."

"Yeah, well. You get out of class. Because you carved a goddamn swastika in a desk. I should carve a swastika into a desk."

"Or something religious. Or racist," Steve says.

"Walk into school wearing a white sheet over your head and say you're KKK," I say.

"We don't have any black kids, nobody will get upset about that," Jimmy says.

"Well, we don't have any Jews, either, look what happened to me," I say.

"Good point," Steve says.

"They should ask me where they think I'm going to be in five years," Jimmy says.

"Where's that?" I ask.

"I don't know, but either prison or Hell."

We keep shooting. Jimmy's aim can't get any worse, but Steve and I get sharper and sharper as the afternoon wears on. We start drawing fast as we can, quick-shooting at the bright orange targets. We don't do well overall, but just once I go nine-for-nine and Steve gets eight-for-nine, so when the sun sets and we've burned out all the daylight, we're pretty happy. Jimmy quick-draws a few times, but it gets to the point that we don't see some of the shots kicking up dust from the mound, so not wanting to hit some random car two miles out the valley, we pack up the pistol and the box of clays and go inside. We leave the shattered clays sit.

In the garage, we set up a few lawn chairs. Steve helps himself to the fridge.

"You think your dad would notice if we took some of his beer?" he asks.

"Yes."

"Shit." Steve grabs three cokes and passes them out. "Dick wouldn't mind."

"Dick is a fuck," Jimmy says. He cracks open the can and sips it and burps. "I asked him about your friend, though, Dean."

"Ray?"

"Yeah, that's the guy. Didn't need the name, Dick knew him by description." Jimmy nods. "Yeah. Says he's always at the VFW and the Legion and stuff. He's one of the guys who went out to Afghanistan but he's not in the service anymore."

"Well, that's obvious." Steve folds his arms. "He's in a wheelchair and he's not in Afghanistan anymore."

"Hey, fuck you." Jimmy burps again. "Anyway, I guess this guy Ray was out on patrol when an IED went off nearby and a piece of shrapnel went into his spine."

"That's it?" I ask. "That's the story?"

"Yeah. Dick's not real good with the stories, from the way it sounds, that's all. He wasn't rushing out into fire to protect his buddies or saving civilians."

"Or running out from cover like a dumbass?" Steve says.

"Yeah. None of that. Nothing special, I guess."

"Huh." Steve spins his soda tab around a few times and then pops it off and flips it into the air like a coin. It hits the ground and bounces. "That's a tough break. You don't even get a good story out of it. No 'I killed seven terrorists before they got me,' just, 'A roadside bomb exploded and now here I am.'"

I take a drink of coke and wipe my mouth. "Maybe it was worth it. You gotta think, whatever is over there can't be much worse than over here."

"Whoa." Steve puts down his coke and makes a time-out motion. "I hate Henninger and class and all that as much as you, man, but running out and taking a bullet for Old Glory doesn't sound like a good time to me, either. I was just saying, you know, if you've gotta be paralyzed, might as well get a good story out of it."

I shrug. "Yeah, you're probably right. But, did you guys ever think about it? Going out there, fighting for something?"

“And be like Dick?” Jimmy crumples up his can and helps himself to the fridge for another. “No thank you.”

“You’re not going to any damned Afghanistan,” Steve says. “Dean, the military is hard work. You can’t just join the military because you don’t know what else to do. If you don’t care about the US now, you’re not gonna care while you’re there.”

Steve’s saying what I’ve been thinking. I don’t have a reason to go. My reason is that I have no reason. But it was a thought. I say, “Yeah, you’re right. You tell me to rush at some guy who’s shooting at me, for America’s sake, I’m going to tell you to go fuck yourself.”

“That’s the spirit.” Jimmy lifts his coke. “I can drink to that.”

■            ■            ■

When I park in the back lot the next day and head in to school, I take a second to look out at the track. Ray’s not there. I don’t know why I would expect him to be there at 7 in the morning, but I look anyway. Fog’s hanging over the field and the sun is starting to turn it gold. I kind of appreciate how cool it looks, not that I’m a poet.

I take a few notes here and there throughout the day. Mostly I sketch. I try to capture what I saw that morning, try sketching the fog, the way it covered the field like a blanket. In pencil, everything turns gray, and I throw that drawing away. The rest of the drawings aren’t so ambitious. A field goal post with a long shadow on the field. A bunch of circles connected to circles inside of circles, like a chain-link fence. My hand goes on autopilot and makes shapes and as I shade them in they become formless, meaningless patches of gray. I don’t know what I’m drawing until I finish, when I look down and ask myself, *Why can’t I do better?*

I feel like I’m on autopilot myself, wandering into class and sitting down and pulling out my notebook but not taking any notes, making sketches instead. In homeroom, Steve and Jimmy both give me funny looks. We wait for the Cannonball to show up while Steve shuffles the cards.

“You with it today?” Jimmy asks.

“Yeah,” I say. “I don’t know. I’m thinking a lot.”

“Well, we’ve got a card game here,” Jimmy says, “Get your head out of the clouds.”

“Hell, get your head out of your ass,” Steve says. The Cannonball shows up and we start a game. Steve and Jimmy watch me through homeroom

and during lunch. They argue like usual but I don't add much.

"Let's hang out here after class," Jimmy says at the end of lunch. "We can walk around the track and shoot the shit before the football game. Steve?"

"I'm always down."

"Dean?"

"Yeah." Why not? "Sure. I'll catch you guys then."

I wander through the rest of my day, drawing and sketching. I stop paying attention to the shape of things and start drawing crisscrossing lines. I shade them in. They look like stained glass, or a shattered watch face.

When I get to Mrs. Wentz's class, I find a brand new desk. All of the old markings from the past thirty years of students are gone. The desk feels weird and out of place. It smells new. I try to ignore it but that makes the back of my neck hot. I try and sit there and ignore it, but my hands are shaky and I have to go to the bathroom and smoke a cigarette. When I come back to class, I want to draw on the desk, want to scratch something into the top or even underneath, where no one will see at first, to say "fuck you" in secret, but Mrs. Wentz keeps walking by and looking over my shoulder and I don't get the chance. She sees me drawing in my notebook and tells me to copy the examples from the board and then keeps walking. I keep my eye on her and take notes when she's nearby and flip to my drawings after she passes.

At the end of the day, I'm the first one of me and Jimmy and Steve outside. I pull out my pack of cigs and light up and walk out to the stadium to wait for them. I walk to the ticket booth and look out over the field. Ray's not there. The chain is hooked across the walkway. I step over it, careful not to drop my cigarette out of my mouth and I head down the slope to the track, not sure what I'm looking for.

There's not much to look at. Ray was here. I can see his tire marks, thin lines in the dirt. Or maybe they're from yesterday. I reach out with my foot and etch a line across Ray's tracks. I kick gravel over them, but even with his mark covered, I know he was still here. Circling the track, pushing himself but going nowhere. He has nothing better to do. He does the same thing every day. Stuck, with no ending in sight, and no story to tell. I was wounded by a roadside bomb in Afghanistan and now I'm in a wheelchair. That's all. I drew a swastika in a desk. That's all. I drive my rig, I work at

the drug store, I want to be a state trooper and *that's all*. Pushing ourselves to go nowhere.

Cars rumble behind me as the students leave, going God knows where. Jimmy and Steve will be here any minute. We'll walk around the football field and talk and wait until the game. That's all. I toss my cigarette butt on the tracks and stomp it out and I think, *there must be more than this*, not that I knew what it was.



## CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

**Katherine Alders** is a current freshman in the Leavey School of Business at Santa Clara University and is pursuing a minor in studio art. Her works focus on reflecting the personal struggles and triumphs of those around her as well as her own.

**Clare Banks** is associate editor for *Smartish Pace*. A 2014 recipient of a Maryland State Arts Council Individual Artist Award, she has an MFA in poetry from the University of Maryland. She lives in Baltimore City with her family.

**Jake Barz** is a junior economics major born in Singapore and raised in New Jersey. He travels because of the learning experiences that come with meeting new people and places, and photographs these experiences whenever possible. He is an economics intern at Sony Entertainment Network.

**Joseph Bathanti** is Poet Laureate of North Carolina. He is the author of eight books of poetry, including his most recent, *Concertina*. His books of fiction are *East Liberty*, *Coventry*, and *The High Heart*. He teaches at Appalachian State University.

**Casey Clifford** is a sophomore at Santa Clara University, majoring in environmental science with a minor in studio art. She hopes her pieces demonstrate the importance of environmental issues through artistic expression.

**Neil Connelly** is the author of five books, most recently *The Pocket Guide To Divorce* (Gorsky Press), winner of the 2014 Molly Ivors Prize. He teaches at Shippensburg University.



Calligraphy from different times and cultures has influenced **Tim Dilbeck's** current work. The "characters or letters" he creates are brush stroke forms of visual and emotional expression. They operate through color interaction, structure, and style. No two are exactly alike.

**Lawrence Eby** is the author of *Flight of August* (Trio House Press, 2014), which won the 2013 Louise Bogan Award. He is the founder of Orange Monkey Publishing and a founding member of PoetrIE, a literary non-profit in the Inland Empire of Southern California.

**Martín Espada** was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1957. He has published more than fifteen books as a poet, editor, essayist and translator. His latest collection of poems, *The Trouble Ball* (Norton), is the recipient of the Milt Kessler Award, a Massachusetts Book Award and an International Latino Book Award. His previous book of poems, *The Republic of Poetry* (Norton), was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. He has also received an American Book Award, the Shelley Memorial Award, the PEN/Revson Fellowship and a Guggenheim Fellowship. The title poem of his collection, *Alabanza*, about 9/11, has been widely anthologized and performed. His book of essays, *Zapata's Disciple* (South End Press), has been banned in Tucson as part of the Mexican-American Studies Program outlawed by the state of Arizona. A former tenant lawyer in Greater Boston's Latino community, Espada is currently a professor in the Department of English at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.

**James Freitas** is a junior at Santa Clara University. As an English major, he frequently writes poetry and short stories.

**Samiah Haque** is currently an MFA student at the Helen Zell Writers' Program, where she edits for *The Michigan Quarterly Review*. Her work appears in *Nashville Review*, *Paper Darts*, *CURA: A Literary Magazine of Art and Action*, and elsewhere. She has received fellowships from Vermont Studio Center and Kundiman.

**Krista Jensen** is a senior psychology major and anthropology minor. Although being a student and player on Santa Clara University's softball team takes up most of her time, creative writing has always been a passion along with binge-watching shows on Netflix.

**Kristen Keckler's** poems, essays, and stories have appeared in *Ecotone*, *The Iowa Review*, *Vestal Review*, *South Dakota Review*, *The Southeast Review*, *Prick of the Spindle*, and other journals. She is a regular contributor to Bill and Dave's Cocktail Hour, a blog about reading and writing. She currently teaches English and creative writing at Mercy College in Dobbs Ferry, New York.

**Jesse Kidd** lives in Charlotte, North Carolina. He has previously had work published in *Iodine*, *Main Street Rag* and *Furious Season*.

**Kirsten Klaas** is a senior English major at Santa Clara University who feels that creative writing is truly a kind of warm chicken soup for the soul. She hopes to stir up many more kettles—complete with saltine crackers—as her writing career advances.

A native of central Pennsylvania, **Louie Land** studies at Bucknell University and has been published in *The Idle Class*, *FRiGG Magazine*, *The Susquehanna Review*, *Unwound Magazine*, and *Dog Pond*, among others. He is also a jazz enthusiast and plays jazz guitar.

**Qiuzi Emily Lin** is an international student from Beijing, China. She is a freshman at Santa Clara University majoring in accounting and information systems. She has a great passion for art and enjoys painting during her spare time.

**Mary Helen Mack** is a senior pursuing a BS in biology with a minor in chemistry, and a BA in studio art. Through both art and science, she pursues truth, and in education and travel she seeks greater understanding.

**m.f. nagel** was born in Anchorage, Alaska.

Her Athabaskan-Eyak heritage gave her a love of poetry.

She lives near the banks of the Matanuska River in the Palmer Butte,

Where moose, wild dogroses, and salmonberries

Provide joy and inspiration.

**Trenton Pollard** is an MFA candidate at North Carolina State University. Originally from Michigan, he has been a welder, massage therapist, graphic designer, and political organizer. His work can be found in *Cedilla*, *plain china*, and *Wading in Ladies*.

**Shannon Price** is a junior English major at Santa Clara University specializing in creative writing. She credits her family for putting up with her craziness and allowing her to express her creativity with everything from chalk to charcoal to Crayola.

**Joe Proudman** was raised in California's Central Valley among corn fields and fighter jets. He studied photography at San Jose State University and journalism at Columbia University. Find more of his work at [www.joeproudman.com](http://www.joeproudman.com).

**Dalton Provost** has been making art since high school, where he started with sketches and charcoal but quickly moved into ink work. He is from Salt Lake City, Utah. He is a river rafting guide and skis nearly every day in the winter when he's home.

**Khoa Sinclair** is a writer, artist, and fashion enthusiast. He is based in Denver and blogs about street style at [www.khoasinclair.co](http://www.khoasinclair.co). In his free time he enjoys thinking about his life mistakes and racking up credit debt.

**Phillip Sterling** is the author of *In Which Brief Stories Are Told* (fiction), *Mutual Shores* (poetry), and three chapbook-length series of poems. His flash fiction has appeared in *Edge*, *Epiphany Magazine*, *Midway Journal*, *Bear River Review*, and others.

**Brian Thorstenson** is a San Francisco-based poet and playwright. His poetry has appeared in *50 Haikus*, the *Santa Clara Review*, *Fourteen Hills* and *New American Writing*. He teaches in the Creative Writing Department at San Francisco State and the Theater Department at Santa Clara University.

**David Verba** currently lives in Seattle, Washington, but is from Cleveland, Ohio, where he received his BFA and MFA. His artwork may be seen on his website, [www.davidverbagallery.com](http://www.davidverbagallery.com), and his most recent work may be seen on his Facebook page: David Verba Gallery.

**Robert Vivian** is the author of *The Tall Grass Trilogy* and two books of meditative essays, *Cold Snap As Yearning* and *The Least Cricket Of Evening*.

*Santa Clara Review* wishes to thank Martín Espada for permission to reprint the following poems: “Mi Vida: Wings of Fright,” “Cada puerco tiene su sabádo,” and “For the Jim Crow Restaurant in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Where My Cousin Esteban Was Forbidden to Wait Tables Because He Wears Dreadlocks,” from *Alabanza*, New York: W.W. Norton, 2003; “Return,” from *The Republic of Poetry*, New York: W.W. Norton, 2006.



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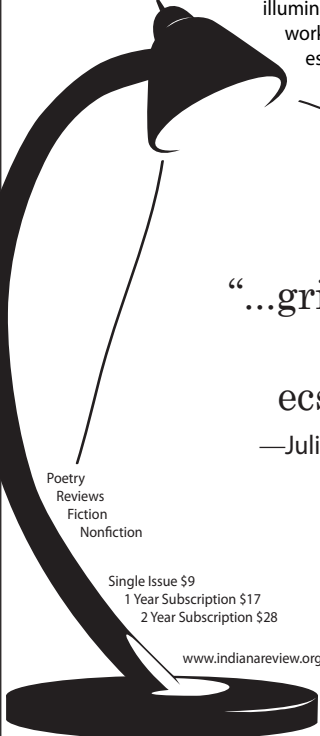
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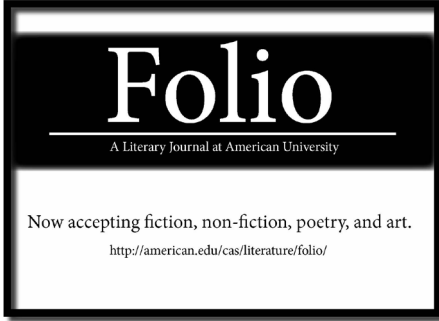
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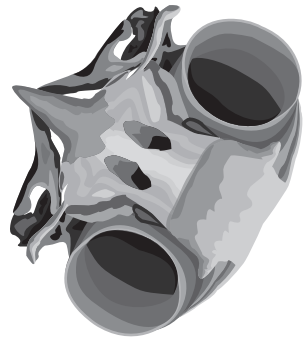
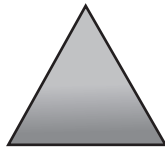
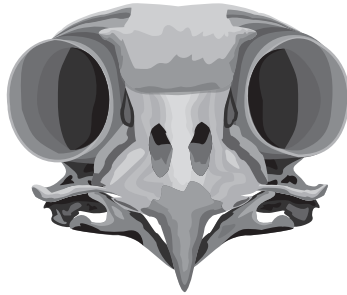
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